



REPORT

AN ASSESSMENT OF SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES GOVERNANCE, LIVELIHOOD & COASTAL CONSERVATION IN SIERRA LEONE FROM A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE





The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) is a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) established by Act (No.9) of 2004, with the mandate to “protect and promote human rights in Sierra Leone and to provide for other related matters.” As part of its functions of “effective co-operation...with other public-interest bodies engaged in the field of human rights”, the Commission went into corporate partnership agreement with the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) to implement projects related to Sustainable Oceans with particular reference to small-scale fisheries and coastal communities, climate change and environmental issues in Sierra Leone.

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FOREWORD



The fisheries sector in Sierra Leone represents not only an essential pillar of our national economy but also a vital source of food security and livelihood for nearly a quarter of our population. The small-scale fishers who operate within our coastal communities, often with less privileges and vulnerable to climate impacts, are at the heart of this sector. It is for this reason that the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) as a statutory NHRI has produced this assessment report, which is both timely and crucial to the pending Sierra Leone Marine Spatial Planning.

This report provides a detailed examination of fisheries governance and coastal conservation through a human rights lens, emphasising the fundamental rights to livelihood, food security, participation, and access to justice of small-scale fishers. It recognises the interconnectedness of environmental protection and social development, highlighting the urgent need to address the blatant challenges of overfishing, illegal industrial incursions into the Inshore Exclusive Zone (IEZ), weak enforcement of laws, and climate change that threaten the sustainability of our marine ecosystems and the welfare of coastal communities.

A particular focus of this report is the inclusion and empowerment of vulnerable groups, notably women, who play critical roles in fish processing and marketing but face significant barriers such as gender-based violence and limited access to financial resources. The report advocates for a gender-responsive approach in fisheries policies and institution-building efforts to ensure equitable opportunities and protections.

This assessment underscores the importance of robust legal frameworks, such as the Fisheries and Aquaculture Act 2018, and the Fisheries Policy 2016, which provide strong foundations for sustainable fisheries management aligned with international standards including the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). However, it is evident that implementation gaps remain a persistent obstacle that must be urgently addressed through enhanced institutional coordination, capacity building, and community engagement.

Moreover, the adverse impacts of climate change (coastal erosion, rising sea levels, and extreme weather conditions) are increasingly undermining the resilience of fishing communities, demanding integrated adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies within fisheries governance. Through community consultations across fourteen fishing sites and multi-stakeholder engagements, this report amplifies the voices of rights holders, revealing challenges and opportunities for inclusive and equitable governance. I commend the Directorate of Climate Change and Information Services for working in collaboration with our colleague NHRI, the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR), for producing this field-based report.

As Chairperson of HRCSL, I call on Ministries, Department and Agencies (MDAs), development partners, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and fishers themselves to embrace and operationalise the human rights-based recommendations contained in this report. Together, we must strive to strengthen a fisheries sector that safeguards the dignity, rights, and future sustainability of small-scale fishers and coastal ecosystems for generations to come.

Signed

Patricia Narsu Ndanema (Mrs)

Chairperson, Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone

July 30, 2026



HRCSL Data Collectors Team at Yelebuya Island - Photo by HRCSL Media

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



This national assessment of fisheries-related laws, policies, and plans together with the perspectives of rights holders in the small-scale fisheries sector, was made possible through the generous support of our counterpart and donor partner, the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida).

HRCSL extends its profound gratitude to DIHR and Sida for their technical and financial support. The Commission is particularly grateful to the DIHR Team Leads Maria Ploug Petersen and Sofie Gry Fridal Hansen for their expertise in building the capacity of HRCSL staff to undertake a project of this nature. Their commitments to promoting human rights and fisheries governance, climate change and sustainable development for vulnerable fishing communities in Sierra Leone has been instrumental to the success of this work.

The Commission is equally grateful to all those who contributed their time and insights during the community outreach and data collection process. The active participation of Commissioners, staff, and community stakeholders enriched the findings of this assessment and ensured that the report captures diverse perspectives and lived experiences in the fisheries sector.

HRCSL sincerely appreciates staff of the Directorate of Climate Change and Information Services (DCCIS), regional focal Staff for their dedication in spearheading the implementation of this assessment research.

The Commission also acknowledges the support of partner institutions, the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Small-Scale Fishers (SSF) Unions, community leaders, and government environmental agencies whose collaboration continues to strengthen Sierra Leone's response to fisheries resources management and marine conservation from a human rights perspective.

Finally, this report is dedicated to the resilience of coastal and island fishing communities of Sierra Leone, whose voices inspired us to pursue strategy and solution for human rights-based approach to fisheries governance, marine conservation and livelihood of SSF.

Signed

Victor Idrissa Lansana Esq.,
Vice Chairperson & DCCIS Oversight - HRCSL July 30, 2026

ABBREVIATIONS

ACHPR	- African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights
AWFishNet	- African Women Fish Processors and Fish Traders Network
CFMAs	- Community Fisheries Management Areas
CBEWS	- Community-Based Early Warning Systems
CEDAW	-Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CESCR	- Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CIDMEWS	- Climate Information, Disaster Management and Early Warning System
CMA s	Community Management Associations
CRC	- Convention on the Rights of the Child
DCCIS	- Directorate of Climate Change and Information Service
DIHR	- Danish Institute for Human Rights
DRM	- Disaster Risk Management
EEZ	- Exclusive Economic Zone
EIA	- Environmental Impact Assessment
EPA	- Environmental Protection Agency
FAO	- UN Food and Agriculture Organization
FGDs	- Focus Group Discussions
FPIC	- Free Prior Informed Consent
GANHRI	- Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions
GEWE	- Gender Equality and Women Empowerment
GFWA	- Gbara Fish Women Association
GoSL	- Government of Sierra Leone
GRiF	- Global Risk Financing Facility
HRCSL	- Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone
ICCPR	- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

IEZ	- Inshore Exclusive Zone
IUU	- Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated
KII	- Key Informant Interviews
MCSE	- Monitoring, Control, Surveillance and Enforcement
MDAs	- Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MFMR	- Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources
MLCP	- Ministry of Lands and Country Planning
MoECC	- Ministry of Environment and Climate Change
MTCA	- Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs
NaCSA	- National Commission for Social Action
NAP	- National Action Plan
NASSIT	- National Social Security and Insurance Trust
NCCP	- National Climate Change Policy
NDC	- Nationally Determined Contribution
NDMA	- National Disaster Management Agency
NDPRP	- National Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan
NE	- North-East
NGOs	- Non-Governmental Organization
NHRIs	- National Human Rights Institutions
NMA	- National Mineral Agency
NPAA	- National Protected Area Authority
NW	- North-West
NWR	- North-West Region
ONS	- Office of National Security
PSSNYE	- Productive Social Safety Nets and Youth Employment
SDGs	- Sustainable Development Goals
Sida	- Swedish International Development Agency

SLAAFU	- Sierra Leone Amalgamated Artisanal Fishermen Union
SLAFCU	- Sierra Leone Artisanal Fishers Consortium Union
SLAFU	- Sierra Leone Artisanal Fishermen Union
SLMA	- Sierra Leone Maritime Administration
SLMeT	- Sierra Leone Meteorological Agency
SLWFU	- Sierra Leone Women in Fisheries Union
SRSP	- Shock-Responsive Social Protection
SSF	- Small-Scale Fisheries
SSF Guidelines	- FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication
UDHR	– Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	- United Nations
UNDP	- The United Nations Development Programme
UNFCCC	- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNICEF	- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UN OHCHR	- United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
WA	- Western Area
WAPNaP	- Western Area Peninsula National Park

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This assessment report by HRCSL provides a comprehensive assessment of fisheries governance and coastal conservation in Sierra Leone, focusing on the human rights of small-scale fishers (SSF). Sierra Leone's fisheries sector, divided into artisanal, industrial, and inland/aquaculture sub-sectors, faces challenges including overexploitation of fish stocks, conflicts between SSF and industrial trawlers, limited enforcement of fisheries laws, inadequate social protection, and governance weaknesses. These challenges are further aggravated by climate change impacts such as sea level rises, coastal erosions, and disaster risks which threaten ecosystems and the resilience of coastal communities.

The analysis of the legal frameworks related to fisheries as provided in this report, clearly indicates that Sierra Leone possesses a relatively robust and modern fisheries governance framework. The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act 2018, supported by the Fisheries Policy 2016, Environmental Protection Act 2022, Forestry Amendment Act 2022, and related legislation, provide a strong basis for sustainable fisheries management and environmental protection. The fisheries legislation provides a strong legal framework against Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, integration of environmental protection and biodiversity conservation, recognition of small-scale fisheries and food security concerns, and improved labour and social protection framework. The framework is broadly consistent with the principles of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines).

However, full implementation challenges remain in the areas of tenure security, social protection, access to justice, gender inclusion, enforcement, and climate change adaptation. Strengthening these areas would significantly improve the resilience and sustainability of Sierra Leone's small-scale fisheries sector. The effectiveness of the framework depends largely on institutional coordination, enforcement capacity, adequate financing, scientific research, and meaningful participation of small-scale fishing communities in decision-making processes. As HRCSL interacts with rights holders in the fisheries sector as captured in chapter four, the major gaps identified include: institutional weak enforcement capacity and limited logistics; insufficient fisheries research and stock assessment data; limited co-management and community participation mechanisms; poor integration of fisheries, forestry and environmental institutions; low social security coverage for artisanal fishers; and climate change adaptation measures require further operationalisation.

The general impression is that marine fisheries resources are rapidly depleting, and that all sub-sectors, such as the small-scale fisheries sector and the semi-industrial and industrial sectors, are contributing to the depletion of fish stocks and the wider marine ecosystem through illegal and harmful fishing practices. Declining fish stocks and poverty are seen as further accelerators of illegal and harmful fishing practices in the small-scale fisheries sector. SSF are poorly funded and organised, and few women are represented in SSF organisations. Although fisheries policies are

in place, and are generally in compliance with State human rights obligations and the SSF Guidelines, there are many implementation gaps and a lack of accountability for their implementation. This results in overexploitation of the fisheries resource and incursions by industrial vessels into the SSF Inshore Exclusion Zone, among other challenges¹.

Field data gathered through engagement with 14 fishing communities revealed widespread conflict with industrial fishing operations, drastic reductions in fish catches, low awareness of fisheries rights and regulations among SSF, limited effective participation in fisheries management, and barriers to accessing remedies when human rights violations occur. Women play a significant role in fish processing and marketing but face specific barriers including sexual harassment, inadequate financial and structural support, empowerment and weak implementation of the Sexual Offences Act². Key international human rights instruments such as the ICESCR, SSF Guidelines, and UN conventions on environment and disaster risks underpin the report's human rights framework, emphasising rights to livelihood, food, participation, social development, a healthy environment, and access to justice.

The report concludes that while Sierra Leone has made important strides in establishing a fisheries governance framework aligned with the SSF Guidelines and other human rights instruments, weak implementation, institutional coordination challenges, lack of adequate resources, and climate change impacts undermine sustainable fisheries management and the welfare of small-scale fishing communities.

Summary of Findings Include:

Governance and Access to Resource Tenure: Communities expressed satisfaction over the transparency in the issuance of fishing licenses but questioned the timing and lack of consultation when authorities increase the license price. Also, women and non-boat owners who depend on fishing value chain are left out with no alternative livelihood support during the one month closed season (ban) imposed by the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR). 79% of the 14 communities reported that they had conflict with industrial trawler fishers. Industrial fishing activities have disturbed their artisanal fishing process. SSF continued to be harassed and sometimes beaten by the foreign fishing trawlers crews who are armed with guns. The Fisheries Officer interviewed, expressed that they are incapacitated due to lack of sea mobility and other resources.

¹ DIHR and HRCSL, 'Report on the Preliminary Scoping study on the fisheries management and governance in Sierra Leone, 2025

² GoSL, Sexual Offences Act 2012 as Amended, 2019

Sustainable Fisheries and Conservation: Fair application of conservation rules between SSF and industrial trawlers is clearly provided for in both the Fisheries and Aquaculture Act 2018 and Fisheries Regulations 2019. However, enforcement of these laws has been weak according to Dr. Baio's report³. Among the 14 communities engaged, only one (1) community said YES to fair application of conservation rules; 13 (93%) of the communities expressed unfair application of the rules, pointing to ongoing destruction of SSF fishing gears by industrial trawlers and ships used by multinational companies. Community involvement in habitat protection is low. Among the 14 clustered communities, only 2 (14%) acknowledged involvement; 50% said they were not involved and 36% were unaware of any habitat protection activities.

Participation in Fisheries Management and Governance: The legal review revealed that Fisheries and Aquaculture Act is structured to allow shared management between communities and government bodies, supporting co-management and participatory governance, demands the Director of Fisheries to encourage the formation of artisanal fishers associations and fostering collective representation.

The feedback from community members indicates that participation often remains consultative rather than meaningfully influencing decision-making. Women and youth were not always adequately represented and there existed huge capacity constraints within fishers' organisations. The SSF Unions were observed to be fragmented and limited in their operations. Some rural fishing communities noted that they had little or no knowledge about the existence and operations of the various SSF Unions which clearly shows a representation gap.

Community Awareness of rules and Participation: The level of community awareness about the fisheries laws and regulations is low; only 4 (28%) communities acknowledged that they were aware of fisheries rules and their rights. These communities were mostly from the urban coastal areas. The SSF in rural communities were less considered for involvement in decision-making; only 6 (43%) of the communities visited acknowledged having been involved in national decision-making while 7 (50%) said they have not participated and 1 community said 'partially'. The low involvement of community members in policy formulation and decision-making often lead to challenges when it comes to implementation because the intended rights holders do not own the policy or initiative. 57% of participants of Focus Group Discussions (FGD) did not see SSF Unions as useful in seeking their interest. In his response, a Union Executive member noted that their role has not been useful to many SSF because there is no cordial relationship between them and the MFMR.

Access to Remedy and Justice: The report illustrated that of the 14 communities visited, 79% acknowledged the existence of channels to report violations. However, SSF expressed facing various barriers (structural, institutional, economic, social), which limited their ability to access

³ Baio, A, 'Small-scale Fisheries Governance in Sierra Leone from a Human Rights Perspective', 2025

remedy. The high cost of legal action, limited access to legal aid and poverty made legal processes challenging.

In assessing the effectiveness of grievance mechanisms, it was revealed that there existed some challenges in addressing violations or abuses committed at sea: 43% of selected communities rated the grievance mechanism at local level as ‘Very effective,’ 36% ‘somewhat effective,’ and 21% ‘not effective’. The SSF also continued to suffer violation/abuses at sea due to limited fisheries inspectors and patrol vessels, weak Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS), difficulties in obtaining evidence of harassment and destruction of fishing gears, which render their complaints to the Ministry inadmissible and with no action. Many prefer customary dispute resolution, which were sometimes without fair remedy.

Social Protection and Livelihood Support: Explicit social protection measures such as welfare, health, insurance, or safety nets for SSF communities are not detailed in the fisheries Act. Social protection for SSF was lacking and SSF fall within the self-employed category, meaning joining National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NASSIT) is optional. Coastal communities continue to face inadequate access to healthcare, sanitation, limited educational facilities and food insufficiency. Some communities reported of poor road networks and the lack of health posts nearby. Many do not have formal social security insurance, relying instead on local saving clubs.

The assessment revealed that Sierra Leone has various community-based financial mechanisms, including Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), Financial Services Associations (FSAs), and Community Banks. However, of the 14 fishing communities consulted, only two (2) communities reported access to an organised community financial service. This suggests a significant gap between the availability of financial inclusion initiatives at the national level and their accessibility to small-scale fishing communities.

The income of 93% of SSF communities engaged were severely affected by seasonal patterns. SSF further expressed concern over government implementation of the yearly close season, which had negatively affected their livelihood because of lack of alternative livelihood particularly for SSF women.

Gender Equality and Women's Roles: The Fisheries Act does not explicitly mention gender equality or women's specific rights, Community Management Associations (CMAs) in the Act offer entry points for gender equality. However, explicit gender-responsive measures and rights protections are absent. Women were reportedly facing specific restrictions such as being barred from fishing sites as a result of social taboos related to menstruation and physical appearance: 64% of communities confirmed that women faced such restrictions. Also women and children in fishing communities continue to be vulnerable and face sexual and financial exploitation.

Climate Change Impacts and Community Access to Early Warning system: The national Climate Information, Disaster Management and Early Warning System (CIDMEWS)⁴ was established to provide weather, climate, flood, and disaster warnings through collaboration between the government, the meteorological agency and disaster management institutions. The Sierra Leone Meteorological Agency (SLMet) provides marine weather forecasts, sea-state information and warnings specifically intended for fishers, coastal communities and maritime users⁵. The National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) and partners have implemented Community-Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) and conducted awareness activities in coastal communities such as Tombo, Shenge, Bonthe Island, and Konakry-Dee⁶.

Despite the above progressive initiatives, FGD participants indicated that access to and utilization of climate and disaster early warning information remains limited in many coastal and island fishing communities. Eight (8) out of the 14 fishing coastal and island communities consulted reported that early warning systems were not accessible to them, while 6 (43%) reported that early warning information was accessible. This suggests that a majority of communities lack access to timely weather and disaster information, reducing their ability to prepare for and respond to climate-related hazards such as storms, flooding, coastal erosion, and rough sea conditions. Consequently, the existence of early warning systems has not yet translated into a strong perception of community preparedness for climate-induced disasters.

Community Readiness for Climate Change Impacts: Participants rated community readiness to climate change impacts as ‘Low’, ‘Medium’ and ‘High’ in seven, five and two communities respectively. The fact that 50% (7 of 14 communities) rated community readiness as low suggests that many communities perceived significant weaknesses in their ability to anticipate, withstand, and recover from climate-induced disasters. The predominance of low readiness ratings among coastal and island fishing communities suggests that climate vulnerability remains high. In Yelebuya, Rikitts and other Islands, participants associated low readiness with inadequate access to financial resources, weak infrastructure, limited disaster preparedness mechanisms, limited climate information, and heavy dependence on fisheries-based livelihoods. These factors reduce communities' capacity to anticipate, respond to, and recover from climate-induced disasters such as flooding, coastal erosion, and severe storms.

The five communities rating themselves as medium indicate that some coping mechanisms exist such as community solidarity, local leadership, or previous experience dealing with hazards, but these are still viewed as inadequate for major climate events.

⁴

⁵ <https://slmet.gov.sl/our-services/marine/>

⁶ <https://ndma.gov.sl/>

The two communities rating them as high were from the Western Area. They had some advantages such as better access to financial services, stronger community organisations, greater NGO or government support and better infrastructure.

The findings indicate a need for strengthened community-based disaster preparedness, climate adaptation support, and improved access to finance, and greater investment in resilient coastal infrastructure. The FGDs revealed that seven communities reported low readiness for climate-induced disasters, which indicates that while adaptation measures exist in policy or projects initiatives, they were not yet sufficiently accessible, funded, or institutionalised at the community level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community Awareness on Responsible Governance of Tenure

1. **Enhance Community Awareness:** The MFMR in collaboration with HRCSL should conduct extensive public education and awareness raising programmes for SSF on existing fisheries laws, regulations, and human rights standards in local languages.
2. **Promote Transparency in Licensing:** The MFMR and Sierra Leone Maritime Administration (SLMA) should publish clear licensing criteria and procedures, ensure fair and non-discriminatory allocation of fishing rights, and make licensing decisions inclusive and publicly available.
3. **Strengthen Accountability & Enforcement:** The MFMR and SLMA should apply enforcement measures fairly and consistently across all fishing sectors, including industrial trawlers. Provide clear mechanisms for complaints, appeals and remedies, and actively work to prevent corruption and abuse of authority.
4. **Enforce IEZ Regulations:** MFMR and SLMA should strictly enforce the Inshore Exclusion Zone (IEZ) regulations to prevent industrial trawlers from encroaching on artisanal fishing grounds, protecting SSF livelihoods and fishing gear.
5. **HRBA to Marine Spatial Planning:** The MFMR and MLCP should ensure the application of an HRBA in the upcoming Marine Spatial Planning Process (MSP) in order to reduce risks of human rights violations, including infringement of tenure rights.

Sustainable Fishery Resource Management

1. **Implement Stock Assessments:** MFMR and SLMA should conduct regular stock assessments in the IEZ to establish fish stock size and composition, thus providing essential data for informed management planning.
2. **Integrate SSF in Decision-Making:** MFMR should ensure meaningful involvement of SSF and coastal communities in decision-making processes for conservation initiatives, moving beyond mere consultation to active participation.

3. **Combat Pollution & Degradation:** Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and National Mineral Agency (NMA) should enforce environmental regulations and follow up on environmental impact assessment of mining activities
4. MFMR should ensure that SSF have access to alternative fuel sources (for drying, smoking fish and cooking) to reduce reliance on mangrove cutting through GoSL's Renewable Energy Initiatives and Feed Salone Programmes.
5. Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) and development partners should strengthen Local Councils on development of waste management systems.

Participation of SSF in Fisheries Management

1. **Strengthen SSF Organizations:** The MFMR should support the formation and capacity building of SSF associations particularly women's associations, marketing groups, and artisanal unions to ensure their effective representation in fisheries governance and management at both the local and national levels.
2. **Ensure Inclusive Policy-Making:** MFMR should actively involve women and youth in policy-making processes, local area plans, and zoning decisions in order to ensure that their perspectives are heard and integrated.
3. **Promote Co-Management:** MFMR should fully implement co-management structures that delegate management responsibilities to local authorities and CMAs, thus empowering communities to take ownership of policies and initiatives.
4. MFMR should ensure gender equality and youth involvement in the leadership of the CMAs.

SSF Access to Remedy

1. **Establish Accessible Grievance Mechanisms:** MFMR and SLMA should establish and publicise a grievance mechanism that is affordable and accessible to SSF communities in order to enable them report violations and abuses including collisions and harassments by industrial trawlers.
2. **Improve handling of sexual harassment cases:** The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MGCA) should work in collaboration with MFMR to enforce the reporting and handling of sexual harassment cases in SSF communities.
3. **Provide Legal Aid:** The Legal Aid Board should extend legal aid services to coastal communities to overcome cost and distance barriers to accessing courts and legal remedies.
4. **Ensure Government Transparency in Disputes Resolution:** MFMR, NMA & EPA should improve transparency in government handling of disputes between SSF and industrial trawlers or mining companies, ensuring impartial resolution and holding all parties accountable.

Social Development

1. **Expand Social Protection Schemes:** In alignment with the SSF Guideline,⁷ MFMR and NASSIT should make social protection systems available for all SSF, both women and men working along the SSF value chain.
2. **Improve Access to Essential Services:** GoSL and Development Partner should invest in and improve access to healthcare, sanitation, education, and sustainable energy sources in coastal fishing communities.
3. **Provide Alternative Livelihoods:** MFMR and development partners should develop and implement community empowerment programmes that offer alternative income sources, especially for women in order to reduce reliance on fishing during closed seasons and mitigate the impact of seasonal patterns on income.
4. **Support Market Access & Infrastructure:** GoSL should mobilise domestic resources through the setting aside of a certain percentage of revenue from industrial fishing licenses, seek support from World Bank and other development partners in order to improve road networks and transportation to facilitate better market access for artisanal fishers and their products as well as to invest in fish processing facilities to add value to catches and reduce post-harvest losses.

Gender Equality and Women's Roles

1. **Develop and Integrate Gender-Responsive Policies:** MFMR should review Fisheries and Aquaculture Act 2018 to incorporate explicit gender equality provisions that recognise and protect women's specific rights in fishing activities, governance, and resource tenure.
2. **Enhance Women's Participation and Leadership:** MFMR should establish formal mechanisms to include women in all levels of decision-making, including community fisheries management associations and policy development processes; and support and scale up women's groups like the African Women Fish Processors and Fish Traders Network (AWFishNet) to amplify women's voices and leadership in fisheries governance.
3. **Address Social and Cultural Barriers:** MFMR and MGCA, in collaboration with HRCSL, should engage in robust community sensitisation campaigns aimed at reducing discriminatory customs such as restrictions on women's presence at landing sites during menstruation, and combat gender-based violence including "sex-for-fish" exploitation.
4. **Increase Access to Productive Resources and Services:** MFMR should facilitate women's access to fishing licenses, credit, training, technology, and markets to strengthen their economic empowerment within fisheries value chains.
5. **Improve Data Collection and monitoring:** MFMR should institutionalise sex-disaggregated data collection on fisheries participation and impact to better inform policy and program design targeted at women fishers.

⁷ Ibid, Section 6.3

6. **Provide Capacity-Building and Awareness:** MFMR in collaboration with HRCSL should provide trainings for MFMR staff, SSF Union Members and community fisheries leaders on human rights, gender equality and women's rights in fisheries governance and sustainable fishing practices, leadership, and advocacy.

Disaster Risks and Climate Change impacts

1. **Strengthen Early Warning Systems:** SLMeT, EPA and SLMTA should implement and ensure accessibility of early warning systems for disaster and climate-related risks (e.g., storms, flooding, and sea level rises) in all SSF communities.
2. **Develop Climate Adaptation Programmes:** EPA and MFMR should create and fund stronger climate adaptation programmes for SSF communities, including support for alternative livelihoods and mangrove protection and planting initiatives.
3. **Mainstream Climate Change in Legislation:** MFMR and MoECC should integrate explicit provisions addressing climate-induced relocation, sea-level rises, coastal erosions, and extreme weather impacts into fisheries legislation and policies.
4. **Relocation of SSF from Sinking Islands:** MLCP and NDMA should facilitate human rights-compliant relocation of fishing communities from sinking islands such as Yelebuya, Turtle Island and Plantain Island to prevent loss of lives from the impact of climate change in compliance with human rights standards.



CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION & COUNTRY CONTEXT

1.1 Background

Sierra Leone's coastal zone, extending over approximately 402 kilometers, is a diverse yet fragile ecosystem comprising bays, beaches, estuaries, lagoons, mangroves, and other vital blue carbon repositories. This sector supports an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 157,000 square kilometers and hosts more than 200 fish species, forming the foundation of livelihoods for nearly 25% of the national population engaged in small-scale fisheries (SSF)⁸. Additionally, fish and fishery products provide over 90%⁹ of the country's primary protein intake, underscoring the coast's immense value for both food security and economic development within the broader context of the fisheries and marine resources.

Traditionally, coastal communities in Sierra Leone have thrived on fishing, agriculture, and trade. These communities are ethnically diverse and home to different groups but face widespread poverty, economic stagnation, and increasing reliance on external assistance. Recent estimates show that a large percentage of the Sierra Leonean population is found in the coastal areas of the country, approximately 20%¹⁰ and they make substantial use of the coastal resources for their livelihoods. The socio-economic activities of coastal communities include; boat building, handicrafts, fishing, fish processing and marketing and wildlife hunting. With a national population growth rate of 2.1%¹¹, the coastal population will continue to grow with a corresponding increasing demand for coastal and marine resources, thereby increasing the degree of their exploitation.

Despite their long-standing socio-economic importance, coastal residents today confront a multi-layered crisis shaped by environmental, social, and governance-related vulnerabilities. Rising sea levels, increasing coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion, and extreme weather events have already triggered forced relocations in areas such as Turtle Islands, Plantain Island, Sherbro Island, and Yelebuya. These climate impacts are not only degrading marine ecosystems but are also undermining housing, infrastructure, and community livelihoods. As environmental conditions deteriorate, they trigger climate-induced migration around coastal communities in search of safer and more sustainable living conditions.

HRCSL, in its interaction and monitoring of coastal communities, observed that the pervading poverty and the absence of alternatives (including alternative fuel) for coastal communities have

⁸ GoSL, "Sierra Leone Blue Economy Strategic Framework, 2020, p6

⁹ Ibid; p.6

¹⁰ Ibid; p.7

¹¹ World Bank Open Data --- <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.GROW> , 2026

led to unsustainable exploitation of the fisheries ecosystem such as the cutting of mangroves for firewood, fish smoking and as construction materials, which further undermines livelihood.

1.2 Background Information on the Fisheries Sector of Sierra Leone

The fisheries sector is one of the most vital sectors of the economy of Sierra Leone. It plays a major role in food security, employment, income generation, foreign exchange earnings, and rural livelihoods. Fish is the main source of animal protein for a large proportion of the population, especially coastal and low-income communities.

The fisheries sector in Sierra Leone is generally divided into four main sub-sectors:

- Artisanal Fisheries – Small-scale Fishers
- Industrial Fisheries
- Semi-Industrial Fisheries
- Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture

1. Artisanal Fisheries (also refers to Small-Scale Fisheries-SSF) - This is the dominant fisheries sub-sector and it contributes the majority of fish landings in the country. The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, 2018 describes artisanal fisheries as small-scale fishing activities carried out by local fishers using canoes and simple fishing gear. However, the FAO (2024) calls for a definition that includes both the act of catching fish, and to activities happening before and after the fishing itself. For instance, tasks like building boats, repairing nets, processing fish and selling seafood are also part of small-scale fisheries¹². In Sierra Leone, small-scale fishing takes place mainly in estuaries, rivers, and inshore coastal waters. Important landing communities include Tombo, Kent, Tokeh, Goderich, Konakriydee, Shenge, Bailor Wharf and Bonthe. The Artisanal fisheries provide employment for thousands of fishers, fish processors, traders, boat builders, and transporters. Women play a major role in fish processing and marketing.

The small-scale fisheries of Sierra Leone exploits diverse ecosystems such as coastal near shore, estuaries, intertidal zones, mangroves and the open sea - targeting species such as *Sardinella* species (Herring); *Ethmalosa fimbriata* (Bonga Shad); *Decapturus rhonsus* (False Scad (Pollock)); *Chloroscombrus Chrysursus* (Atlantic Bumper (Kente)); *Pseudotolithus elongatus* (Bobo Croaker (Gwangwa)); *Galoides decadactylus* (Lesser African Threadfin (Shinenose))¹³.

2. Industrial Fisheries - Industrial fisheries in Sierra Leone are large-scale commercial fishing operations that use mechanised vessels and advanced fishing technology to catch large quantities of fish, mainly for export and commercial markets. They are regulated by MFMR under the Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, 2018. Industrial fishing companies typically use large trawlers and

¹² FAO , Small-scale fisheries governance – A handbook in support of the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines 2024; p.7

¹³ Baio, A. "Small Scale Fisheries Governance in Sierra Leone from a human rights perspective: A report submitted to HRCSL and DIHR, 2025, p3

purse seine vessels equipped with engines, sonar, GPS, fish finders, and refrigerated storage. They target high-value species such as shrimps, cephalopods (squid and cuttlefish), demersal fish (such as snapper and grouper), and pelagic species. They are permitted to fish mainly in offshore waters, although some vessels have been reported to enter areas reserved for small-scale artisanal fishers. They land their catches either in Sierra Leone or at foreign ports, depending on license conditions and company arrangements.

The environmental damage caused by industrial fisheries including overfishing, which threatens food security and the livelihoods of artisanal fishing communities, destruction of seabed habitats through bottom trawling, which drags heavy nets across the ocean floor, damaging coral habitats, seagrass beds, and other important marine ecosystems such as juvenile fish and breeding grounds may also be destroyed. Industrial fishers are also known for bycatch fishing, which is catching non-target species, including juvenile fish, turtles, sharks, rays, etc., and many of these animals are discarded dead or injured. They are also involved in illegal fishing in the Inshore Exclusion Zone (IEZ), which is reserved for artisanal fishers. They damage fishing gears and reduce catches available to local communities. Industrial fishers also contribute to biodiversity loss by removing large numbers of fish and accidental capture of protected species disrupts marine food webs and reduce biodiversity.

3. Semi-Industrial Fisheries -Semi-industrial fisheries in Sierra Leone form a medium-scale fishing subsector that bridges the gap between artisanal and industrial fisheries. They typically use motorised wooden or fiberglass vessels that are larger and more powerful than artisanal canoes but much smaller than industrial trawlers. These vessels mainly operate in coastal and nearshore waters, targeting species such as snapper, grouper, croaker, barracuda, and other demersal fish using gears such as gillnets, handlines, longlines, and traps. The semi-industrial subsector plays an important role by supplying fish to local markets and processing facilities, creating employment for fishers, crew members, processors, and traders, and contributing to food security and local livelihoods.

However, the subsector also faces challenges, including limited access to finance, inadequate landing and cold-storage facilities, rising fuel costs, competition with industrial fishing vessels, and the need for stronger monitoring and sustainable management to prevent overfishing and protect marine resources.

4. Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture - Inland fishing occurs in rivers, lakes, swamps, and floodplains across the country. Aquaculture is still developing but has strong potential due to the availability of inland valley swamps and freshwater resources. Common cultured species include tilapia and catfish.

1.3 Overall Aim and Objectives

Aim

The overall aim of producing this report is to promote a human rights-based approach to fisheries management and marine governance. This is to ensure small-scale fishers have secured, safe and enhanced access to marine resources to sustain their livelihoods and culture, and participate meaningfully in the management of coastal and marine ecosystems for increased environmental sustainability and respect for human rights.

The Objectives were to:

1. Provide an overview of HRCSL's interventions in addressing the human rights issues of SSF through awareness raising and the creation of a platform for SSF involvement in meaningful fisheries governance and management issues.
2. Analyse the key legal, policy and institutional frameworks governing the management of the fisheries and marine resources in alignment with the State's human rights obligations.
3. Identify the human rights issues affecting SSF, and the degree of involvement of these communities on fisheries and marine resource governance and Management, and the human rights threats and challenges faced by same.
4. Map out strategies to engage State actors and other stakeholders on issues raised in the report and on the implementation of its recommendations to ensure the full application of a human rights-based approach to fisheries governance/management and coastal environmental protection.

1.4 Scope

In this assessment report, the key focus is on small-scale fisheries (SSF), which is also referred to as the artisanal fishing sector. 'Artisanal' as described in the Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, means small-scale, or commercial fishing using an artisanal fishing vessel and gear where the owner is directly involved in the day-to-day running of the enterprise using canoe or un-decked vessel with a length of not more than 10 meters overall, and which is motorised or not motorised, powered by an outboard or inboard engine not exceeding 40 horsepower, sails or paddles, and does not include decked or undecked semi-industrial fishing vessels or vessels used for recreational fishing¹⁴.

However, the Fisheries Act only offers a technical definition but determining what is small-scale is often a social, cultural and political question rather than a technical one. Therefore, FAO calls for a definition that includes both the act of catching fish, and to activities happening before and after the fishing itself. For instance, tasks like building boats, repairing nets, processing fish and selling seafood are also part of small-scale fisheries in this context. In this assessment, the

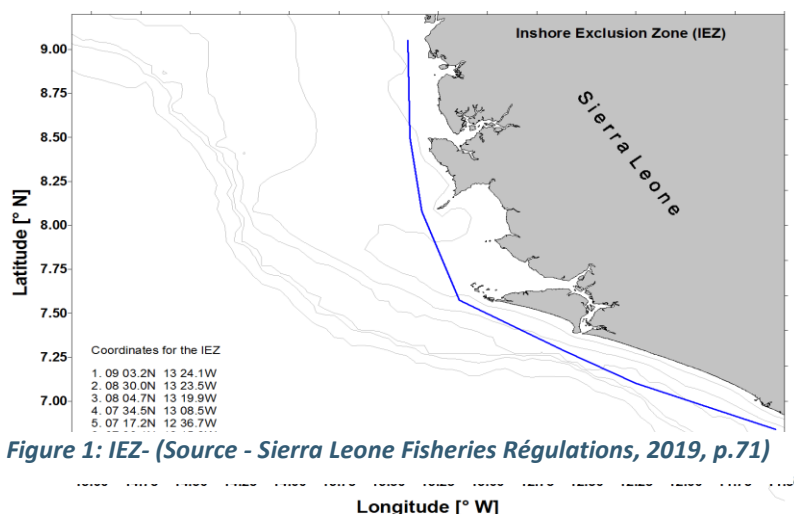
¹⁴ GoSL, The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, 2018, (Section 1) p. 2

communities selected were within the coastal and fishing island areas of the Inshore Exclusion Zone (IEZ) located in three geographical regions: Western area, South and North- western regions. The IEZ consists of all waters seaward of the low-water line along the coast of Sierra Leone, to the line connecting the coordinates of latitude and longitude. As shown in Figure 1, it covers a distance of 5-6 nautical miles (nm).

This area is reserved for small-scale fishing vessels and recreational fishing, excluding semi-industrial and industrial fisheries operators. Thus, the exclusive demarcation could also serve as another definition of small-scale fisheries in Sierra Leone with respect to an area of fishing operations i.e., all fishing units legally operating in the IEZ¹⁵.

The assessment targeted various categories of small-scale fishers and key fishing community stakeholders drawn from fourteen (14) coastal/Island communities selected in six districts- Bonthe, Moyamba, Port Loko, Kambia, Western Rural and Western Urban.

Participants selected were fishing crews, boat owners, harbour masters, fish processors, fish sellers, master fishermen, fishing community heads, Mammy-Queens, maritime security, police personnel in fishing communities, MFMR officers, youth and persons with disabilities representatives, Councillors and religious leaders.



1.5 Organisation of the Report

This report starts with an Executive Summary highlighting the key findings and recommendations of the assessment on the fisheries governance and marine conservation in Sierra Leone. The report is further divided into five chapters:

- **Chapter One** gives the introduction on the fisheries, country context, the aim and objectives and the scope of the assessment.
- **Chapter Two** presents the approach and methodology of the assessment process including highlight of pre-assessment activities, selections criteria of locations and participants, description of the analytical framework data collection tool, ethical and privacy consideration, and limitation and quality assurance.

¹⁵ Ibid (Andrew Baio), p1

- **Chapter Three** highlights a summary analysis of the legal and institutional framework instruments geared towards promoting sustainable fisheries management, environmental conservation, food security, economic development, and the welfare of fishing communities, particularly small-scale fishers.
- **Chapter Four** presents the outcome analyses of the field data collection in the fourteen (14) fishing communities drawn from the three coastal regions.
- **Chapter Five** highlights the summary of findings, conclusion and next steps.



CHAPTER TWO: APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Approach and Pre-Assessment Activities

The Pre-Assessment activities included hiring of a Fisheries Expert to do desk review analysis of fisheries laws, policies and plans, a training to build the capacity of Commissioners and staff of HRCSL and Executive members of small-scale fishers Unions, and Community outreach and awareness raising on human rights and fisheries governance in SSF communities and coastal Islands.

Desk review of fisheries laws, policies and plans – HRCSL and DIHR engaged a fisheries expert (Dr. Andrew Baio) who conducted a desk review analysis of fisheries laws, policies and plans, which this report draws on. The desk reviewed used a human rights-based analytical framework, and was later complemented by semi-structured interviews through telephone calls with relevant MFMR officials.

Capacity building for Commissioners and Staff - The fisheries expert and DIHR co-facilitated a two-day capacity-building training on human rights and small-scale fisheries for Commissioners, Staff of HRCSL and representatives from the Small-Scale Fishers Unions (SSFU) on 5th and 6th February 2025 in Freetown. The training strengthened the skills and knowledge of participants to undertake activities that would promote a human rights-based approach to fisheries management and marine governance. The training equipped HRCSL staff with the ability to conduct advocacy programmes and baseline research on fisheries governance and marine conservation.

Public Education and Awareness Raising –sequel to the training received, HRCSL commenced conducting community outreach and advocacy campaigns on human rights and fisheries in three geographical regions, namely: Western Area, North- West, and Southern regions in June and July 2025 and continued to the first two quarters of 2026. The engagements were organised in the form of town hall sessions, in which 44 clustered fishing communities converged in three locations of Tombo, Goderich and Shenge village. The community outreach and advocacy campaigns continued from December 2025 to April 2026 in Bailor Wharf and Yelebuya Islands in Kambia district; Mahera, Konakrydee, Karmem in the Port Loko district; Mopaala, Shenge and Gbangbatoke in the Moyamba district and Yargoi in Bonthe district; and Tokeh, Funkia, Tombo and Banana Island in the Western Area. Fourteen (14) of these communities were further engaged in data collection, which findings were captured in this report.

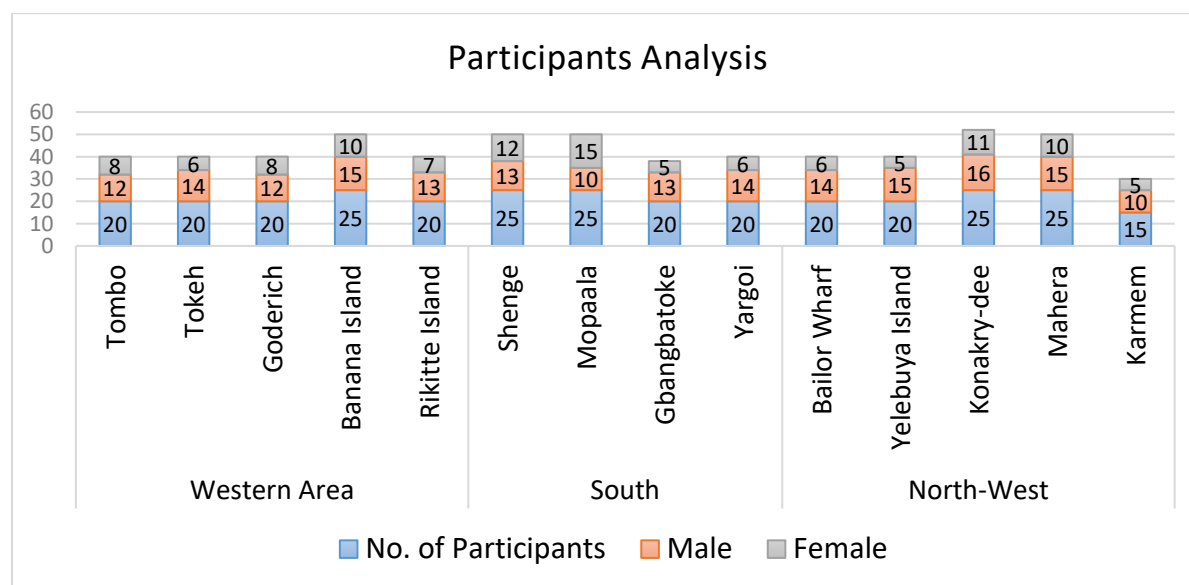
2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Selection of Locations

The community outreach and public education created an opportunity for HRCSL team to identify the fourteen (14) most significant fishing hubs and landing sites across the three regional coastlines- Western Area, North-West and Southern regions. The areas covered were particularly selected because they fall under the Inshore Exclusion Zone where small-scale fishing communities are highly active and reflect diverse experiences related to access to marine resources, local fisheries management, SSF in frequent conflict with industrial fishers, and other emerging factors such as challenges posed by conservation initiatives, coastal development and urbanisation, and blue economy activities.

2.2.2 Selection of Participants for FGDs and KIIs

Participants were purposefully selected for FDGs due to their various roles in the small-scale fishing sector and the fishing community. A total of 300 participants were drawn from the 14 communities selected for this survey. The categories of participants included: Fishing crews, fish traders, boat owners, fish processors, harbour masters, community heads (men & women), and youth. The KIIs targeted the following: Union representatives, local law enforcement officers in the field, local Councils (Ward Councilors), MFMR field Officers and CSOs.



2.2.3 The Analytical Framework Data Collection Tool

The data collection tool for the Sustainable Oceans Project in Sierra Leone was developed through support from the DIHR. The tool is structured based on the analytical framework aligned with provisions of SSF Guidelines, which is underpinned by international human rights and related standards. This framework enables a comprehensive assessment of fisheries governance,

management and coastal conservation from a human rights perspective.

HRCSL employs this analytical framework to examine the structural, procedural, and outcome dimensions of human rights compliance in small-scale fisheries contexts, specifically:

- **Structural aspects** - Focuses on laws, policies, and institutional arrangements that recognise and uphold the legitimate tenure rights of fishers, promote sustainable resource management, and guarantee social development rights.
- **Process aspects** – Assesses the implementation of these legal and policy frameworks, including participation in governance, enforcement of regulations, transparency, and access to remedy mechanisms.
- **Outcome aspects** - Explores the lived experiences of rights holders (small-scale fishers, fish workers, and marginalized groups) highlighting the effectiveness of governance in securing their rights, livelihoods, and resilience to environmental risks.

The tool utilises qualitative and quantitative methods through FGDs and KIIs by engaging diverse stakeholders such as fishing crews, boat owners, fish processors, local authorities, law enforcement officers, MFMR workers, and union representatives. Both the FGDs and KIIs were structured in a way that captured data which complement each other under the same fisheries governance and management themes highlighted in the box below:

Fisheries Governance Themes

- Responsible Governance of Tenure and Fisheries Resources
- Sustainable Fishery Resource Management
- Participation of SSF in Fisheries Management
- SSF Access to Remedy
- Social Development
- Gender equality
- Disaster Risks and Climate Change impacts

By integrating human rights principles into fisheries governance analysis, the tool allows HRCSL to identify strengths and gaps in current governance arrangements, emphasising inclusivity, transparency, and equitable resource use. This approach provides actionable insights to promote responsible fisheries management and uphold the rights and well-being of small-scale fishing communities in Sierra Leone.

2.2.4 Ethical and Privacy Consideration

In order to ensure ethical consideration and privacy assurance, some human rights-based principles to data collection were applied. These principles included:

- **Participation** - Various groups of SSF right-holders were involved in the data collection. The data collectors paid special attention to power imbalances, security concerns, language/interpretation needs and accessibility and timing of the focus group discussions. They also paid extra attention to the voices of women, persons with disabilities, the elderly and other minority groups.
- **Disaggregation** - Participants were divided into various group discussions according to gender, title and age to capture the situation for different rights holders in order to understand intersecting forms of discrimination.
- **Self-identification** - Ensuring that participants were provided with the option to disclose or withhold information about their personal characteristics.
- **Do no harm** - Making sure that data collectors were orientated on how to avoid inadvertently contributing to harm such as stigmatisation, tension or conflict through the data collection exercise.
- **Transparency** – Ensuring that prior to FGDs, participants were told clearly who the data collectors were and the mandate of HRCSL they worked for, the purposes of the data collection and how the data would be used.
- **Privacy**- Assuring participants of their privacy protection, and the confidentiality of data collected, and the preservation of their identity.
- **Accountability** - Informing participants that the data collected would be used to hold duty bearers accountable for their human rights obligations and supporting rights-holders/respondents to use the data for their own purposes.

2.2.5 Limitations and Quality Assurance

Although the framework tool used to capture the data of this assessment provides a structured and human-rights oriented approach to fisheries governance assessment, there were limitations in terms of scope and strength, which were considered when interpreting the results and formulating the recommendations. These limitations included:

1. **Limited Geographic and Participant Coverage**- The tool focused on selected study regions and specific groups such as fishing crews, boat owners, processors, and key stakeholder informants. This may not fully capture the diversity and complexity of all small-scale fishing communities across Sierra Leone, potentially limiting generalisability.
2. **Reliance on Self-Reported Data**: Data were primarily collected through FGDs and KIIs, which depend on participants' willingness and ability to accurately recount experiences

and perceptions. This could lead to biases such as social desirability or recall bias, affecting data reliability.

3. **Human Rights Lens May Overlook Other Dimensions:** While the human rights framework provides a comprehensive view of governance and social justice, it may underemphasise other critical factors such as ecological scientific data, economic market trends, or technical fisheries management aspects outside the scope of rights-based analysis.
4. **Complexity of Assessing Implementation and Outcomes:** Assessing structural, process, and outcome dimensions can be challenging given the variability and lack of standardised indicators for some aspects (e.g., “effectiveness” of enforcement or participation). This subjectivity may affect the consistency and comparability of findings.
5. **Potential Underrepresentation of Marginalised Groups** Despite efforts to include women and marginalised groups, cultural and social barriers may inhibit their full participation or expression, resulting in partial insights into their specific challenges and needs.
6. **Limited Quantitative Measures** The tool is primarily qualitative, which limits its ability to quantify the extent or scale of issues such as overfishing, pollution, or social inequalities, thereby constraining detailed statistical analysis for policy decision-making.

Quality Assurance: Notwithstanding the above limitations, quality assurance of the outcome of the assessment was guaranteed by organising a two-day multi-stakeholder workshop held in Freetown, on 24th and 25th June 2026, to discuss the preliminary findings and recommendations of the drafted report. The workshop brought together 60 participants drawn from government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), SSF communities, SSF Unions, civil society organizations, Non-governmental Organisation and development partners. The workshop was facilitated by experts from MFMR, Save the Children Sierra Leone, HRCSL and DIHR. In alignment with the assessment draft report, the workshop focused on the human rights-based approach to small-scale fisheries governance and management, including issues related to SSF livelihood, access to marine resources, participation in fisheries governance, gender equality, and access to remedies. The workshop provided an important platform for fisheries right holders and fisheries and environmental state actors to corroborate the findings, share experiences, and identify practical recommendations to strengthen the protection of small-scale fishers’ rights. The feedback and insights from these consultations were not only incorporated into the finalised report, but also provided a pathway for further actions and collaboration among MDAs and HRCSL.

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS OF LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Overview

The governance and management of the Sierra Leone Fisheries sector is administered by a combination of constitutional provisions, fisheries-specific laws, environmental legislation, labour laws, and social protection frameworks. These legal and policy instruments collectively aim to promote sustainable fisheries management, environmental conservation, food security, economic development, and the welfare of fishing communities, particularly small-scale fishers. These legal and policy frameworks were observed to be aligned with international obligations under UNCLOS, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the SSF Guidelines, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and international and regional fisheries management commitments of which Sierra Leone is a signatory.

3.2 The Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991

Although the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone does not specifically mention fisheries, several provisions provide the legal basis for fisheries governance. It provides the supreme legal foundation for natural resource governance in Sierra Leone.

Chapter two of the constitution provides the Fundamental obligations and Principles of State Policy with regards to achieving political, social, economic and educational objectives.

Key Provisions include:

- Protects citizens' rights to livelihood, food security and economic participation¹⁶.
- Directs the State to manage natural resources for the benefit of all citizens.
- Requires government institutions to promote environmental protection and sustainable development.
- Supports decentralization and local participation in resource management.

The significance of these provisions on fisheries governance is that they establish the legal basis for sustainable utilization of fisheries resources, protection of coastal communities, equitable distribution of benefits derived from marine resources, and State authority to regulate fishing activities.

However, the gaps include limited constitutional guidance on community fisheries management and environmental rights, and there is no explicit recognition of the fisheries resources. Also, the provisions contained in Chapter two of the Constitution do not confer legal rights and therefore cannot be enforceable in any court of law. They are policy objectives fundamental principles in

¹⁶ Section 7 (1)(d); 8 Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991, p.8

the governance of the State, and lay emphases on Parliament to apply these principles in making laws¹⁷.

3.3 The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, 2018

The fisheries and Aquaculture Act, 2018 is the principal legislation governing fisheries and aquaculture in Sierra Leone. The Act aimed at attaining sustainable management of fisheries resources, combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, promote responsible aquaculture development, and enhance food security and livelihood for SSF and Coastal Communities. For the purpose of this report, the focus of the analysis is based on the themes and indicators in the analytical framework introduced in the methodology section.

The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, 2018 reflects modern fisheries legislation and strengths include strong anti-IUU provisions and support for ecosystem-based fisheries management. Its weaknesses or challenges however include limited enforcement resources, weak community co-management structures, no gender responsive measures and rights protections for women are absent, and lack of adequate fisheries data systems.

3.4 Policies, strategies and other relevant Acts

Fisheries and Aquaculture Regulations, 2019

The Fisheries and Aquaculture regulation is the Operational Framework that provide detailed implementation mechanisms for the Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, 2018. The key areas covered by the Regulations include: licensing procedures (vessel registration, license application requirements, and fishing authorization conditions); fisheries monitoring (logbook requirements, reporting obligations and observer deployment; fisheries conservation (closed seasons, protected species, gear restrictions and minimum mesh sizes); and compliance measures including inspection procedures, administrative sanctions and penalty schedules.

The significance of the Regulations are that it transform policy and legal provisions into practical management measures. However, compliance monitoring remains difficult in remote fishing communities, and knowledge of the existence and contents of the Regulations is very low among artisanal fishers.

Sierra Leone Maritime Administration Act, 2000

The Act is the Maritime Governance Framework, which establishes the maritime administration system. The relevance of this Act to Fisheries is that it regulates vessel registration, enhances maritime safety, supports marine law enforcement, and facilitates vessel monitoring. It is

¹⁷ GoSL, The Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991; Section 14, p.

importance to note that fishing vessels operate within the broader maritime domain governed by this Act. In terms of Institutional Linkages, provisions of the Act support coordination between: Maritime Administration; Fisheries authorities; Navy; and Port authorities. However, overlapping maritime enforcement mandates can affect coordination, which could be one of the challenges.

The Environmental Protection Act, 2022

The Environmental Protection Act is the Principal Environmental Legislation that provides the overarching framework for environmental management. The key provisions of the Act relevant to fisheries include Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); mandatory for projects likely to affect the environment (including fish processing plants, aquaculture facilities, and coastal infrastructure); pollution control (marine pollution and prevention, and waste management requirements); biodiversity conservation (habitat protection and ecosystem restoration); and climate change (climate adaptation and mitigation measures). The significance of this Act to fisheries is that it made provisions for the protection of coastal ecosystems, estuaries, mangrove habitats, and fish breeding grounds¹⁸. However, enforcement and monitoring limitations remain the huge gaps.

National Protected Areas Authority Act, 2012

The Act is a Biodiversity and Conservation Framework, which establishes the National Protected Area Authority (NPAA) responsible for protected areas management. Its relevance to fisheries is that it provides for the protection of critical marine and coastal ecosystems. The primary functions of the NPAA include management of protected areas, biodiversity conservation and community participation. The key benefits to the fisheries sector are that protected areas help rebuild fish stocks, protect spawning grounds and maintain ecosystem services. However, among the challenges include potential conflicts between conservation objectives and fishing livelihoods; and resource constraints for management.

The Forestry (Amendment) Act, 2022

This Act replaces the Forestry Act of 1988 and it is the Modernization of Forest Governance in Sierra Leone as it strengthens forest conservation measures. Key Improvements in this Act are that it enhanced penalties for illegal logging, improved protection of mangroves, and provides stronger conservation mechanisms. The fisheries significance of the Act is that it supports protection of fish breeding habitats, climate resilience, and coastal ecosystem sustainability. Irrespective of the good provisions in this Act, enforcement capacity and community dependence on mangrove resources remain a huge challenge.

The Employment Act, 2023

The Act provides a labour Protection Framework. Its relevance to Fisheries Sector include: the protection of Fishers, Fish processors, Aquaculture workers and Fisheries observers. Also there

¹⁸ GoSL, The Environmental Protection Act, 2022; Section 73 (1)–(2); p.52

are provisions in the Act that cater for fisheries workers' occupational health and safety, fair wages, working conditions, gender equality, and protection against discrimination. It is important to fisheries as it addresses labour abuses sometimes associated with fisheries value chains. However, informality of artisanal fisheries employment, and limited labour inspectors in fishing communities are the major challenges in the application of this Act.

National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NASSIT) Act, 2001

This Act is a Social Protection Framework, which establishes the Sierra Leone's National Social Security System. The relevance of this Act to Fisheries sector lies on the fact that it provides social protection for: fisheries employees; formal-sector fish processors; and fisheries administration staff. SSF who contribute to this scheme would receive benefits that included: retirement pensions; invalidity benefits; and survivors' benefits. The significance of this scheme is that it enhances resilience of fisheries workers and their families. However, the challenges are that there is low coverage of artisanal fishers, and the informal workers often remain outside the scheme.

The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act, 2022 –

Although the GEWE Act is not specifically for fisheries, however it is also applicable to the fisheries sector. The Act promotes equal participation of women in fisheries decision-making, leadership, and governance institutions. It generally strengthens women's access to employment, training, financial opportunities, and productive resources including within the fisheries value chain. It encourages non-discrimination and equal opportunities for women, example women engaged in fish harvesting, processing, trading, and marketing. And also supports inclusive fisheries governance by ensuring women's voices are represented in policies and community management structures.

The Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (as Amended 2019) –

This Act was enacted to protect women, girls as well as boys and men from sexual violence and exploitation, which is also applicable to harassment in fishing communities and workplaces. In the context of fisheries governance, the Act helps create safer working environments in fish landing sites, processing centres, and fish markets. It provides legal protection and access to justice for survivors of sexual offences, and promotes dignity, human rights, and gender equality within fisheries and coastal communities.

The Domestic Violence Act, 2007 –

This Act is also important to SSF and coastal communities as it protects family members from physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. The Act promotes peaceful households, which contribute to stable livelihoods and community resilience. It provides legal remedies and protection for victims of domestic violence, and supports the social well-being and productivity of fishing households, which are central to sustainable fisheries governance.

The Child Rights Act, 2007 –

This Act guarantees children's rights to education, health, protection, and development in every community¹⁹. It is important to SSF and coastal communities as the Act provides for the protection of children from hazardous labour, abuse, neglect, and exploitation in fisheries and related activities²⁰. The Act encourages responsible participation of children in family livelihoods without compromising their welfare or education²¹. It also contributes to sustainable fisheries by promoting the healthy development and future capacity of children²² in coastal communities.

Feed Salone Strategy: Fisheries and Marine Resources Sectors in Sierra Leone 2025 – 2035

The Feed Salone Strategy for the Fisheries and Marine Resources Sectors in Sierra Leone constitutes a comprehensive and forward-looking framework for fisheries and aquaculture governance. While primarily framed in developmental and environmental terms, it strongly reflects Sierra Leone's human rights obligations, particularly regarding the rights to food, livelihoods, participation, environmental protection, and transparency. The Strategy, therefore, represents an important step toward integrating sustainable resource management with human-centred development, even as further work remains to embed explicit human rights principle and accountability mechanisms within its implementation.

Sierra Leone National Blue Economy Strategic Framework

The Sierra Leone National Blue Economy Strategic Framework (2020) is a road map and strategic document that is basically a medium-term strategy aimed at supporting sustainable and equitable economic growth through ocean-related sectors and activities in consonance with the state's objective of diversifying the national economy to achieve economic transformation and inclusive growth.²³ The framework is important to small-scale fisheries governance and coastal conservation because it promotes the sustainable use of marine and coastal resources while recognizing that these resources are essential for people's livelihoods, food security, and economic development²⁴. From a human rights perspective, the Framework supports:

- The right to food and livelihoods by encouraging sustainable fisheries that protect the incomes and food security of small-scale fishers.
- Participation and inclusion by promoting the involvement of fishing communities, including women and youth, in decision-making and marine resource governance.
- Equity and non-discrimination by seeking fair access to fisheries resources and opportunities for marginalized and vulnerable groups.

¹⁹ GoSL, The child Rights Act, 2007; Sec. 23; p.14

²⁰ Ibid; Sec 32, 33, & 34; p. 17

²¹ Ibid; Sec. 45; p.21

²² Ibid; Sec. 44; p.21

²³ GoSL, Sierra Leone National Blue Economy Strategic Framework, 2020; p.3

²⁴ Ibid, p.27

- Environmental protection by strengthening marine conservation, reducing pollution, and building resilience to climate change, thereby safeguarding the rights of present and future generations to a healthy environment.
- Good governance and accountability by encouraging transparent, coordinated, and rights-based management of coastal and marine resources.²⁵

In a nutshell, the Strategic Framework provides a foundation for integrating human rights, sustainable fisheries governance, climate resilience, and coastal ecosystem conservation, ensuring that small-scale fishers are protected, empowered, and able to benefit equitably from Sierra Leone's blue economy.

3.5 Institutional Frameworks

The undermentioned MDAs are relevant to fisheries governance and marine conservation, and are institutions responsible for implementing the aforesaid laws and policies. These MDAs work most effectively when they coordinate their efforts, as fisheries governance and marine conservation require collaboration across environmental, maritime, security, labour, land, and local governance sectors.

Institution	Importance to Fisheries Governance
Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources	Leads fisheries policy and management; develops fisheries regulations; issues fishing licences; combats illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; promotes sustainable fisheries; protects fish stocks and supports fishing communities.
Sierra Leone Maritime Administration	Regulates maritime safety and security; enforces shipping standards; prevents marine pollution from ships; coordinates vessel registration and maritime compliance; supports safe navigation
Ministry of Environment and Climate change	Develops environmental and climate policies; integrates climate adaptation into fisheries; promotes ecosystem-based management; coordinates national climate action affecting coastal and marine ecosystems
Environmental Protection Agency Sierra Leone	Enforces environmental laws; conducts Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs); monitors pollution; protects coastal and marine ecosystems from industrial and development impacts.
National Protected Area Authority	Establishes and manages marine and coastal protected areas; conserves biodiversity, mangroves, wetlands and endangered species; supports habitat restoration.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 28

Sierra Leone Metrological Agency	Provides weather forecasts, marine forecasts and early warning systems; helps fishers prepare for storms and extreme weather; supports climate resilience.
National Social Security and Insurance Trust	Provides social security and pension protection for eligible fisheries workers and employees; and strengthens social protection and livelihood security for those who contribute to the scheme.
Ministry of Lands and Country Planning	Oversees coastal land administration and spatial planning; prevents land-use conflicts; supports integrated coastal zone management and protection of critical habitats.
Ministry of Employment Labour and Social Security	Enforces labour standards in the fisheries sector; protects workers' rights; promotes occupational safety; addresses forced labour and child labour issues.
Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces Maritime Wing	Supports maritime surveillance and security; combats illegal fishing, piracy and other maritime crimes; assists in protecting territorial waters and marine resources.
National Mineral Agency	Regulates mining activities, including coastal and offshore mining; minimizes environmental impacts on fisheries; monitors compliance with mining regulations affecting marine ecosystems
Local Councils and Chiefdom Authorities	Support community-based fisheries management; enforce local by-laws; facilitate stakeholder participation; resolve local conflicts; promote awareness of conservation measures and sustainable resource use.

3.6 International and Regional Human Rights and Fisheries Legal Framework

Sierra Leone has ratified several international and regional human rights treaties and thereby assumed binding obligations to respect, protect and fulfill human rights, including the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights for all, including small-scale fishers. UN treaty bodies issue authoritative guidance on State human rights obligations and several of these have issued guidance on the rights of small-scale fishers. Of particular relevance here is the following legal instruments:

International human rights law

- 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR);
- 1965 International Convention on All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICAFRD);
- 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR);
- 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR);
- 1982 United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea

- 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);
- 1990- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC);
- 2007 International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ICRPD)
- 2018 UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP)

Regional human rights law

- 1986 African Charter on Human and People's Rights
- 2003 Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa

International environmental and fisheries law

- 1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF)
- The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982 as you mention it below
- The Global Biodiversity Convention (CBD 1992) with the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework \(GBF\)](#) (which is the implementation framework). This guides a lot of planning around conservation of marine areas.

Regional environmental and fisheries law

- 2014 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS 2050)
- 2016 African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa (Lomé Charter)
- 2010 Revised African Maritime Transport Charter
- ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy (EIMS)
- 2014 Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa (PFRS)

Other important guidelines are:

- 2015 Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines). It is important to note that the analysis of the small-scale fisheries of Sierra Leone with respect to human rights-based approach is contextualised in the SSF Guidelines.
- 2012 Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests Context of National Food Security (Tenure Guidelines - VGGT).

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Overview

Having identified and analysed existing fisheries laws, regulations and policies as presented in chapter three, HRCSL engaged 14 fishing communities on data collection through focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The aim of the data collection was to provide SSF perspectives on their participation in fisheries governance and management, their livelihood and the rate of community participation in policy formulation and implementation as prescribed by national legal frameworks discussed in this report. This chapter presents the results on the Commissions' engagements with the various categories of SSF and coastal communities in six coastal districts of Bonthe, Moyamba, Kambia, Port Loko, Western Rural and Western Urban.

4.2 Responsible Governance of Tenure and Fisheries Resources

Key International and Regional Instruments

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948 – (Articles 7, 19, 21).
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966 – (Articles 19, 25, 26).
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966- (Articles 11 and 15).
- Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment No. 26 on land and economic, social and cultural rights and No. 27 on Economic, social and cultural rights and the environmental dimension of sustainable development
- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), 1981 – (Articles 9, 21, 22, 24).
- UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982 – (Articles 61, 62, 73, 119).
- FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, 1995 – (Articles 6.13, 6.16, 7.1.9, 7.1.10, 7)
- FAO SSF Guidelines (2015) – (Para: 3.1, 5.15, 5.16, 10.4,)
- United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), 2003 – (Articles 5, 7, 10, 13).
- FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT), 2012- (Sections 3A, 5, 6, 9.4, 21).

Human Rights Relevance

- Promotes participation, transparency, accountability, and non-discrimination
- Requires coastal States to manage fisheries resources fairly and sustainably.
- Freedom of expression and access to information
- Community participation in fisheries governance.
- Equality before the law
- Security of tenure and protection of customary and traditional fishing rights linked to an adequate standard of living, right to food, cultural rights and more.

State Obligation: Key State obligations under these instruments:

- Recognize and protect tenure rights to fishing resources for SSF as the resources are key to realising an adequate standard of living including the right to food.
- Community Awareness of fishery rules through public education and awareness raising programmes using local languages where appropriate.
- Transparency and accountability in licensing & enforcement by ensuring fair and non-discriminatory allocation of fishing rights, and make licensing decisions publicly available.
- Participation and access to information making sure small-scale fishers are included in governance and management decisions, and communities can obtain information affecting their livelihoods.

FINDINGS

Responsible governance is reflected in the Fisheries Act, 2018 through provisions on community participation and awareness, transparent decision-making, licensing oversight, and enforcement mechanisms, which is also reflected in the Fisheries and Aquaculture Regulations, 2019. The Fisheries Act empowers the Minister to designate Community Fisheries Management Areas (CFMAs) and devolve certain fisheries management functions to local authorities and community institutions. This promotes awareness of fisheries rules and encourages local stewardship of resources²⁶. The Director of Fisheries is required to prepare and review Fisheries Management Plans in consultation with the Scientific, Economic and Technical Committee and other stakeholders. The Act encourages the participation of fishing communities, industry representatives, local councils, and CSOs in fisheries management. The Act also requires the Director, in collaboration with stakeholders, to promote sustainable artisanal fisheries and encourage the formation of fishers' associations and marketing groups. These associations serve as channels for disseminating information on fisheries regulations and management measures. The Act also provides for “the IEZ to be reserved for artisanal and recreational fisheries”²⁷ thereby recognizing tenure rights and granting preferential access.

The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act also makes provision for the protection of traditional community access rights to fisheries grounds²⁸ and highlights an intent to safeguard community livelihood and cultural ties. The aquaculture planning in the Act includes environmental impact assessments and considers interactions with other resource uses, potentially allowing for adaptive livelihood diversification.²⁹ However, the Fisheries Act lacks explicit provisions on forced relocation or social protections specifically tailored to displacement contexts. Addressing

²⁶ Ibid, Section 11, p.

²⁷ Ibid, Section 18 (1), p.

²⁸ Ibid, Section 53; p3

²⁹ Ibid, Section 51-52; pp.43-44

relocation crises would likely require complementary policies beyond this Act, but its emphasis on community participation, protection of traditional access and ecosystem-based management presents a foundation for integrating human rights-based adaptive interventions.

The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act³⁰ is in alignment with most international standards. It recognizes "commercial fishing" as harvesting fish for sale, barter or trade³¹. The Act provides for clear IEZ reserved for artisanal and recreational fisheries to promote livelihoods through sustainable artisanal fishing using efficient and low impact gear. It also promotes artisanal fishers associations and fisheries marketing associations are encouraged to develop market strategies for artisanal fisheries. The fisheries and aquaculture policy³² provides for improved working conditions and access to resources for women and youth to enable them effectively participate in fisheries governance and management.

Community Awareness of Rules and Rights: The findings on this assessment shows that the fisheries laws, policy and regulations which give directives for the structure of spatial planning are in place and in alignment with international standards. However, the implementation process of these progressive legal and policy instruments is low, which other researchers have confirmed 'result in undesirable outcomes of infringement on tenure rights of SSF'³³. The level of community awareness about the fisheries laws and regulations is also low. As seen in figure 5, only 4 (28%) communities acknowledged that they were aware of fisheries rules and their rights. These communities are mostly from the urban coastal areas. The result further shows that 36% partially knew about fisheries rules and rights while the other 36% said they have never been informed at any community meeting about the fisheries laws, regulations or policies. They lamented that SSF in rural communities are less considered for involvement in decision making; all they were receiving from the authorities were instructions to implement decisions by the Ministry with no prior engagement or consultation.

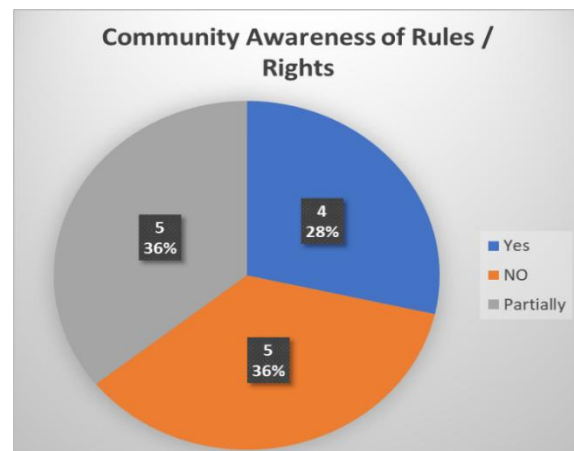


Figure 5: Community Awareness of Rules and Rights

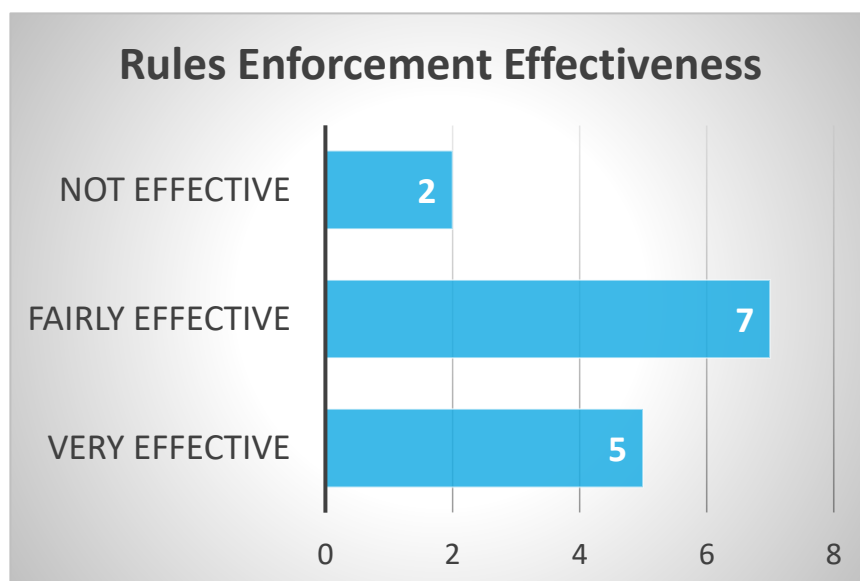
³⁰ GoSL, "Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, 2018

³¹ Ibid, Section 15, p.24

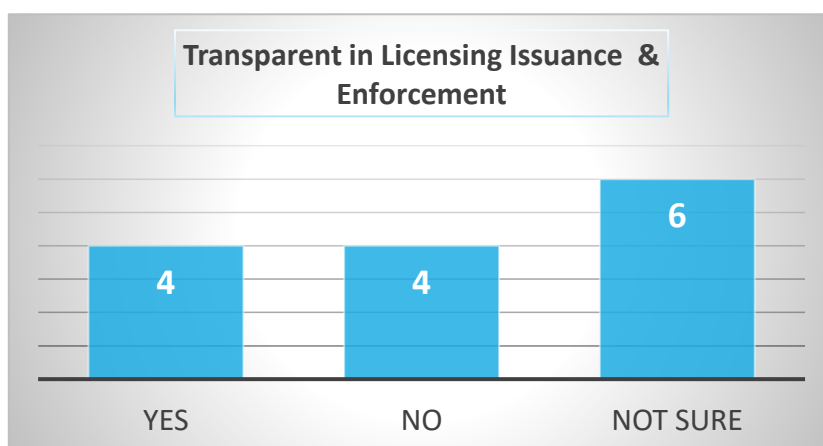
³² GoSL, Fisheries Aquaculture policy, 2016

³³ Baio, A, 'Small-scale Fisheries Governance in Sierra Leone from a Human Rights Perspective', 2025

Effectiveness of Rules Enforcement: Probing into community rating on the level of effectiveness of rules enforcement, 7 (50%) communities indicated that they were ‘fairly effective’, while 5 (36%) said they were ‘very effective’ but with biasness. They emphasised that when SSF mistakenly encroach into Marine Protected Areas, the marine and fisheries officers immediately confiscate their fishing gears, unlike industrial trawlers fishers. The law made provision for IEZ where SSF right holders should operate, but most of the time industrial trawlers would cross into the IEZ and destroy SSF fishing gears with no action taken against them. This result corroborates the findings of a recent research done by Dr. Andrew Baio, who stated that “The lack of enforcement translates into infringement on declared preferential areas for SSF. The IEZ was effectively policed by the World Bank Project but many cases of incursions of industrial operators in the IEZ have gone unaddressed by MFMR once the donor project closed down”³⁴.



Licensing Issuance and Enforcement: The fisheries Act provides for licensing and registration of all categories of fishing vessels, which facilitate formal recognition and potential access to fisheries management benefits. The result as shown in Figure 7, 43% of communities were not sure about transparency in the license process, 29% said “no” while the other 29% of the communities expressed satisfaction over the transparency in the issuance of fishing license but questioned the timing and lack of consultation when authorities increase the license price. They said that authorities use the closed season to increase license fee, and that only those who register or renew their licenses normally receive food palliatives from the



³⁴ Ibid, p. 15

MFMR as alternative livelihood for the one month ban. The communities raised issues of gaps such as delays and the lack of monitoring in issuing licenses to boat owners. Women and non-boat owners who depend on fishing value chain were left out with no alternative support during the closed season.

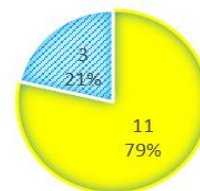
SSF in conflict with Industrial Trawlers: The result of the data collected from the 14 fishing communities indicates that the majority of the SSF and coastal communities predominately depend on fishing activities for survival coupled with farming, trade, casual tourism jobs and sand mining as an alternative means of livelihood. While men do the fishing, SSF women are mainly engaged in fish processing, petty trading and daily management of the home. Both men and women interviewed have been in the fishing process for over ten (10) years, and for some, since they became adults.

Probing into their encounters with industrial fishing trawlers, the result in figure 2 shows that 79% of the 14 communities reported that they had conflict with industrial trawler fishers. In Gbangbatoke, Yargoi, Mopaala and Shenge communities in the southern region, they expressed that among the challenges affecting them

were the destruction of their fishing gears by both Senegalese foreign industrial trawlers and boats/ships belonging to Sierra Rutile and Vemetco Mining Companies. According to them, these issues have been repeatedly reported to the District Council but without any action. Similar reports were also expressed in Mahera, Konakrydee, Kemem and Yelebuya Island in the north-east region; and Rickitts, Banana Island, Tombo, Tokeh and Goderich communities in the Western Area. In Shenge, a community chief expressed frustration on how his subjects were being treated at sea. He pointed out that the industrial fishing activities have disturbed their artisanal fishing processes. Irrespective of several engagements with the fisheries authorities, SSF continued to be harassed and sometimes beaten by the foreign fishing trawlers crews who were armed with guns. He stated that their main occupation was fishing as they heavily depended on it for their livelihoods and to educate their children. He called on HRCSL to advocate on their behalf to the central government for immediate action. The Fisheries Officer, when interviewed, stated that most of the illegal fishing or intrusion into IEZ by industrial trawlers was done at night. He expressed that they were incapacitated due to lack of sea mobility and other resources.

FIGURE2: CONFLICT WITH INDUSTRIAL TRAWLERS

■ YES ■ NO



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Enhance Community Awareness:** The MFMR in collaboration with HRCSL should conduct extensive public education and awareness raising programmes for SSF on existing fisheries laws, regulations, and human rights standards in local languages.

2. **Promote Transparency in Licensing:** The MFMR and SLMA should publish clear licensing criteria and procedures, ensure fair and non-discriminatory allocation of fishing rights, and make licensing decisions inclusive and publicly available.
3. **Strengthen Accountability and Enforcement:** The MFMR and SLMA should apply enforcement measures fairly and consistently across all fishing sectors, including industrial trawlers. Provide clear mechanisms for complaints, appeals and remedies, and actively work to prevent corruption and abuse of authority.
4. **Enforce IEZ Regulations:** MFMR and SLMA should strictly enforce the Inshore Exclusion Zone (IEZ) regulations to prevent industrial trawlers from encroaching on artisanal fishing grounds, protecting SSF livelihoods and fishing gear.
5. **HRBA to Marine Spatial Planning:** The MFMR and MLCP should ensure the application of an HRBA in the upcoming Marine Spatial Planning Process (MSP) in order to reduce risks of human rights violations, including infringement of tenure rights.

4.3 Sustainable Fishery Resource Management

Key International Instruments

- ACHPR Art. 24 (right to a general satisfactory environment)
- ICESCR Art. 11 (right to food, with sustainability being a key aspect)
- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982) - Articles 61–62 require conservation and sustainable use of marine living resources.
- FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (1995)
- United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, 1992)
- United Nations UN Fish Stocks Agreement (1995)

Human Rights Relevance

- Right to food.
- Right to a healthy environment (healthy ecosystems is a component of this right)
- Rights of future generations

State Obligation

- Ensure conservation, sustainable utilization and prevent overfishing.
- Protecting marine ecosystems and biodiversity for present and future generations, mitigate climate change impacts on fisheries and apply the precautionary and ecosystem approaches to fisheries management.

FINDINGS

Conservation/Habitat Protection from a Human Rights Perspective:

The Fisheries Act provides a solid foundation for community involvement in conservation that respects both environmental sustainability and community rights. It adopts an ecosystem approach to fisheries reflecting a balance between societal objectives, biodiversity and resource

sustainability as clearly seen in the definition in the Act of "ecosystem approach to fisheries".³⁵ The Act states that conservation and management measures must be based on best scientific knowledge while taking into account environmental, economic and social factors.³⁶ It establishes CFMAs which give local communities exclusive rights to access and control fisheries resources in designated areas and support local stewardship of fisheries resources.³⁷ The Minister may designate these CFMAs in consultation with Local Councils, devolving fisheries governance functions to local authorities and communities.³⁸ The Act provides for Fisheries Management Plans that can delegate shared management responsibilities to local authorities and CMAs, fostering co-management between the State and communities.³⁹ It promotes participatory rights and reporting and includes measures to involve community fisheries associations in conservation and sustainable use.⁴⁰ On the Aquaculture development, the Act emphasizes collaboration with Local Councils, ensuring ecological sustainability and respect for community livelihood, culture and traditional fishing rights.⁴¹

From the legal analysis stated earlier, fisheries conservation and management are based on precautionary and ecosystem approaches, using best available scientific knowledge to prevent overfishing and adverse environmental effects. The conservation measures include area and seasonal closures, gear restrictions, effort limitations and controlling discards and habitats. The Fisheries regulations recognises the need of ensuring sustainable exploitations providing that the Minister may delegate to a local area management authority, the power to develop community by-laws specifying management measures for managing access rights and the implementation of conservation measures.⁴²

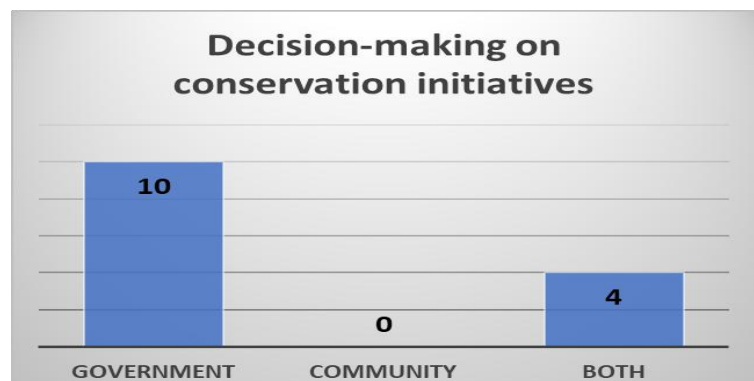


Figure8: Community Involvement on conservation initiatives Decision- Making

The community data collection assessment seeks to know the **involvement of SSF and coastal communities in decision-making on conservation**, the application of conservation rules between SSF and Industrial fishers, and habitat protection activities.

³⁵ GoSL, Fisheries and aquaculture Act, 2018, p6

³⁶ Ibid, Section 10, p.18-19

³⁷ Ibid, p6

³⁸ Ibid, Section 3 (f), p.14

³⁹ Ibid, Section11 (5), p.21

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.19

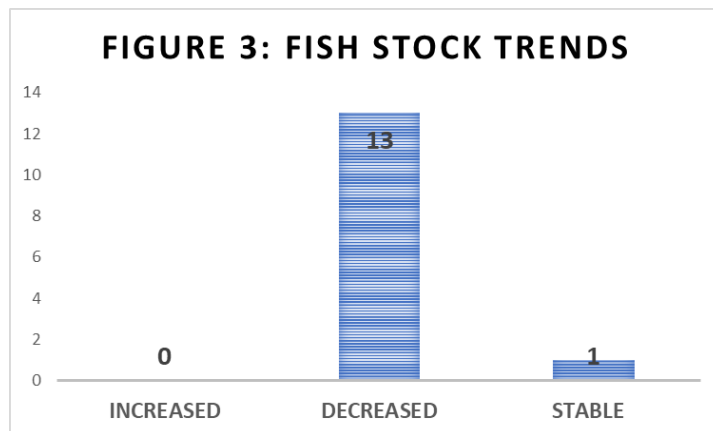
⁴¹ Ibid, Section 52, p.44

⁴² GoSL, The Fisheries and Aquaculture Regulations, 2019, section 5 (2) & (3); p.

In Figure 8, 71% of the communities believed that decision-making on conservation was solely done by government while 29% of the communities said both government and communities were involved in decision making. Among those who said both government and communities made decisions on the conservation of the ecosystem and habitat protection, some expressed dissatisfaction over the implementation of those decisions/rules as they were mostly flouted by industrial fishers whom they claimed were fishing in restricted areas or in the IEZ reserved for artisanal fishers.

Fish Stock Trends: When asked about the current trend of fish stocks, the majority of SSF said that fish catches have drastically fallen to the lowest level. ‘We were expecting an increased number of fishes in the sea after the recent one month closure but we saw the opposite’, communities lamented.

In Figure 3, the result shows that 13 (93%) of the communities engaged agreed that fish stock trends have decreased and only one riverine coastal community, Gbangbatoke, said it was stable. The SSF and coastal communities attributed the huge depletion of fish stocks to harsh weather conditions, bad methods of fishing and overfishing by foreign trawlers in their waters. They stated that although there is a distinct



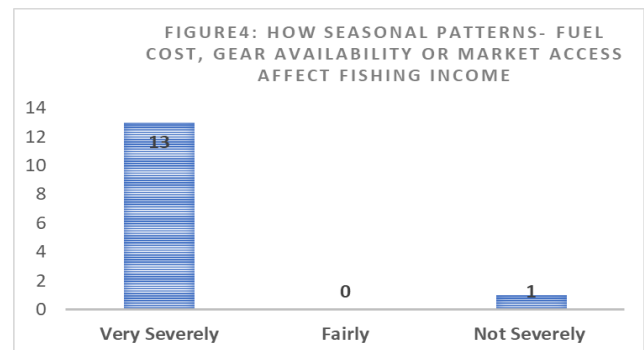
demarcation of the IEZ reserved for artisanal and recreational fisheries to promote the livelihoods of SSF and coastal communities, industrial fishing trawlers most times invade these demarcations. Recent research by Dr. Andrew Baio noted that ‘stock assessment has not been carried out in the IEZ to establish stock size and composition which would inform management planning. This is not in consonance with State responsibilities under UNCLOS and the Code of Conduct’⁴³. It is also inconsistent with the SSF Guidelines that state; “States should establish systems of collecting fisheries data, including bioecological, social, cultural and economic data relevant for decision-making on sustainable management of small-scale fisheries with a view to ensuring sustainability of ecosystems, including fish stocks, in a transparent manner. Efforts should be made to also produce gender-disaggregated data in official statistics, as well as data allowing for an improved understanding and visibility of the importance of small-scale fisheries and its different components, including socio economic aspects”⁴⁴.

⁴³ Baio, A., ‘Small-scale Fisheries Governance in Sierra Leone from a Human Rights Perspective’, 2025, p.10

⁴⁴ SSF Guidelines, Section 11.1, p

The research team also noted that seasonal patterns such as the increase in fuel cost, scarcity of fishing gears and difficulties in accessing marking adversely affect the livelihood of SSF.

As seen in Figure 4, the income of 93% of SSF communities engaged were severely affected by seasonal patterns. In Bailor Wharf and Konakrydee in the North-western region and in Gbangbatoke, Shenge, Yargoi and Mopaala in the Southern region, participants raised issues of how poor road networks and cost of transportation adversely affect their income.



SSF further expressed concern over government implementation of the yearly closed season for SSF that normally happens in February which, according to them, has negatively affected their livelihood because of lack of alternative livelihood particularly for SSF women. In Konakrydee, SSF reported consistent harassment by the Marine or Navy Officers who often confiscate their fishing gears for either intrusion into marine protected areas or for being at sea during prohibited hours. They stated that the cost or penalty of retrieving the confiscated gears is exorbitant as most SSF, particularly women boat owners do not have the financial resources demanded by the Navy or Marine officers. One of the participants in Mahera claimed that the by-laws passed by harbor masters were dictatorial and that they affected the normal fishing activities.

Fair application of conservation rules between SSF and industrial trawlers is clearly provided for in the Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, 2018, the Fisheries Regulations of 2019 and the Fisheries Policy of 2016. The measures and initiatives prescribed by these legal or policy instruments as well as measures at the local level may be helpful in intent but enforcement has been weak according to Dr. Baio's report⁴⁵.

The findings, as presented in Figure 9, corroborate Dr. Baio's submission. Among the 14 communities engaged through focus group discussions, only one (1) community said "yes" to fair application of conservation rules between SSF and Industrial fishers while 13 (93%) communities expressed unfair application of the rules. The research team noted that the community that said "yes" to the question about fair application of conservation rules had limited contact with industrial fishers. In all of the 13 communities, HRCSL team received complaints about the destruction of SSF fishing gears by

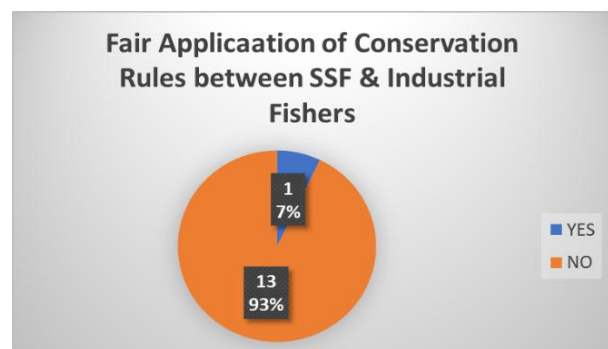


Figure9: Fair Application of conservation Rules

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 15

industrial trawlers and ships used by multinational companies operating in Moyamba, Bonthe and Port Loko districts.

Community involvement in Habitat Protection – SSF participation in the management of the resources is important and supported by the legal provisions of the fisheries law and policy. The involvement of fishing communities on habitat protection activities is necessary for effective co-management to conserve the fishery resource and ensures livelihoods and rights realization now and in the long term. In his report, Dr. Baio notes that previous conservation attempts have failed because of underperformance of institutions that have been too top down and did not properly involve SSF rights holders.⁴⁶ The findings of this assessment revealed that community involvement in habitat protection is low. Among the 14 clustered communities engaged, only 2 (14%) communities acknowledged being involved in conservation activities while 50% said they were not involved in any conservation programmes and 36% said they were unaware of any habitat protection activities. The result confirms the ineffectiveness of implementation of the Fisheries Act that provides responsibilities of Community Fisheries Management Associations in the conservation and management of specific fisheries⁴⁷.

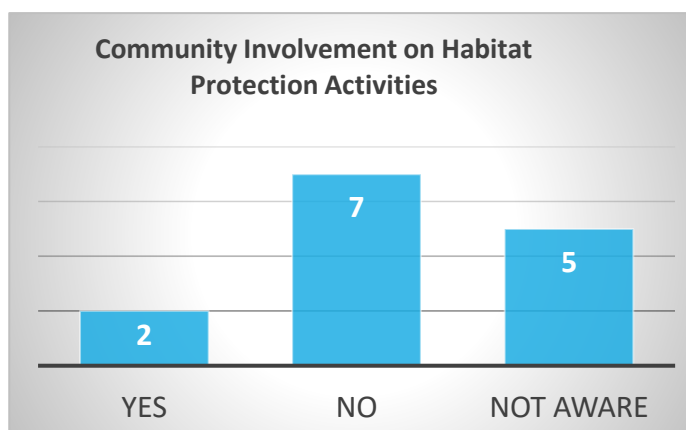


Figure10: Community Involvement on Habitat protection Activities

Pollution and Degradation of the Marine environment/Ecosystem – This is a growing threat in the sustainable management of the Fishery Resources. The result in Figure 11 shows that all of the 14 communities participated in the data collection reported ‘plastic wastes’ as a problem; 13 (93%) communities reported deforestation of the mangroves and land degradation from erosion; 11 (79%) reported of sea weeds, 6 (43%) accounted for illicit sand mining; and 5 (36%) communities reported pollution from mining activities. There is rapid deforestation of mangrove trees in all

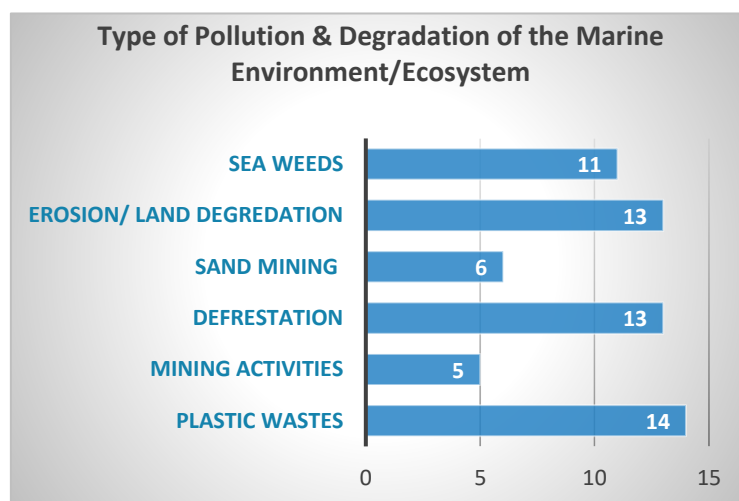


Figure11: Type of Pollution & Degradation of the Marine Ecosystem

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.5

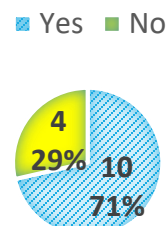
⁴⁷ Ibid, Section 10 (2) (d)

the communities visited, which has led to coastal erosion and loss of biodiversity. The pressure on mangrove cutting for drying fish and causing its depletion, is as a result of the lack of alternative energy sources for local communities to preserve their fish. In Gbangbatoke, Yargoi and Mopaala communities in Moyamba district, they blamed the activities of multi-national mining companies for their water pollution, deforestation of the mangroves and degradation of the marine ecosystem. The Fisheries Act⁴⁸ and the Regulation policy⁴⁹ prohibit pollution of the fisheries waters, and anyone found wanting commits an offence and is liable on conviction to such fine or to a term of imprisonment as the Minister may, by statutory instrument, prescribe. However, this assessment found no evidence of a case against polluters of the sea either by dumping plastic waste or mining activities.

IUU Fishing, Overfishing and Depletion of Fish Catches - The Fisheries Act and the Regulations Policy also provide measures and initiatives to prevent Irregular, Unregulated and Unprotected (IUU) and unsustainable small-scale fishing practices by imposing fines, bans, refusal to land catches at landing sites or reporting to central government. These measures were intended to ensure sustainable resource use. However, the research team noted lack of enforcement of the rules and weak support to carry-out co-management responsibilities.

The result of this assessment as presented in Figure 12, confirms that 71% of fishing communities were facing challenges of IUU fishing, overfishing and depletion of fish catches. One of the chairmen of CMA in Moyamba district stated that the bad method of fishing practiced by some small-scale fishers and trawler owners has greatly impacted the fish stocks with corresponding effect on their economic livelihood opportunity, as they find it difficult to feed and upkeep themselves because they lacked alternative sources of livelihood. The research team observed that the CMAs were empowered to prevent illegal fishing but the area to cover was vast and financial and material support was not forthcoming.

Figure 12: Community Faces IUU Fishing, Overfishing & Depletion Of Fish Catch



Most of the SSF interviewed believed that the depletion of fish stocks was caused by bad methods of fishing, IUU fishing and water pollution caused by the dumping of plastic wastes mostly in the cities, the activities of mining companies and the dumping of poisonous dead fish by industrial trawler fishers. The Fisheries Officer interviewed in Moyamba district pointed out that the SSF

⁴⁸ Ibid, Section 49 (1 -2); p.43

⁴⁹ Ibid, Section 8 (1 -2); p.19

members were engaged in illegal activities such as the use of bed nets, catching of small/juvenile fish, and indiscriminate drying of juvenile fish in the communities.

In order to address these challenges, the community calls for full and fair enforcement of existing laws against bad fishing methods and to also urge the National Mineral Agency to monitor the activities of mining companies to ensure that they refrain from water pollution of the estuaries and the IEZ. They also requested government to provide alternative sources of income through community empowerment programmes and the provision of fish processing facilities. The lack of involvement of communities in conservation combined with declining fish stocks from IUU and pollution shows a significant potential of strengthening community-based conservation in a way that genuinely takes a human rights based approach for a meaningful participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Implement Stock Assessments:** MFMR and SLMA should conduct regular stock assessments in the IEZ to establish fish stock size and composition, thus providing essential data for informed management planning.
2. **Integrate SSF in Decision-Making:** MFMR should ensure meaningful involvement of SSF and coastal communities in decision-making processes for conservation initiatives, moving beyond mere consultation to active participation.
3. **Combat Pollution & Degradation:** MoECC, EPA and NMA should enforce environmental regulations and follow up on environmental impact assessment of mining activities
4. MFMR should ensure that SSF have access to alternative fuel sources (for drying, smoking fish and cooking) to reduce reliance on mangrove cutting through GoSL's Renewable Energy Initiatives and Feed Salone Programmes.
5. GoSL and development partners should strengthen Local Councils on development of waste management systems.

4.4 Participation of SSF in Fisheries Management

Key International Instruments

- ICCPR (Article 19 right to information and Article 25 right to participation) ICCPR, 1966)
- United Nations Aarhus Convention (1998) (important global principle even though mainly regionally adopted)
- FAO SSF Guidelines (2015)

Human Rights Relevance

- Right to participation
- Right to information

State Obligation

- Ensure consultation, representation, and meaningful participation of fishing communities in fisheries governance;
- Enable communities to access information and participate in environmental decision-making and in public affairs

FINDINGS

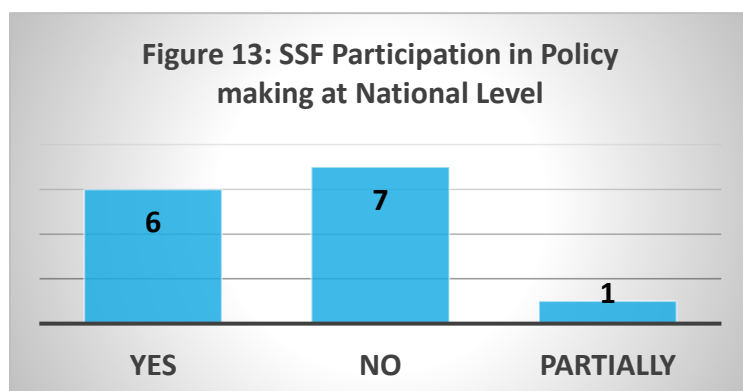
Effective Participation of SSF in Fisheries Policies and Initiatives

The legal review reveals that decision-making process in the Fisheries and Aquaculture Act is structured to allow shared management between communities and government bodies, supporting co-management and participatory governance.⁵⁰ The Act promotes consultation and stakeholder engagement during Fisheries Management Plan development, which involves scientific, economic, technical committees and other stakeholders.⁵¹ The provision of delegation of management responsibilities to CMAs and Local Councils enables organized community participation.⁵² The Act demands the Director of Fisheries, in collaboration with stakeholders, to encourage the formation of artisanal fishers associations and marketing groups, fostering collective representation.⁵³ However, the Act does not explicitly mention SSF unions by name, but the framework supports collective organization and their involvement. Therefore, the Act reflects principles of collaborative governance and stakeholder involvement, facilitating SSF representation through community associations and local councils in policy and management.

The Fisheries Policy (2016) also promotes active participation of fishing communities, development of legal mechanisms for stakeholder engagement and strengthens fishers organizations and associations. Irrespective of this strong legal support for co-management, recognition of community knowledge and alignment with international SSF Guidelines, the full implementation of these provisions remains the main gaps as shown from the outcomes of the field data collection below.

SSF Participation in Policy Making at National Level: Feedback from community members indicates that participation often remains consultative rather than meaningfully influencing decision-making. Women and youth are not always adequately represented and there are huge capacity constraints within fisher organizations.

Figure 13 shows the rate of SSF participation in national policy making. It indicates that only 6 43% of the communities visited acknowledged having been involved in national decision-making while 50% said they have not participated



⁵⁰ Ibid Section 3(f); p.14

⁵¹ Ibid, Section 11, p. 20

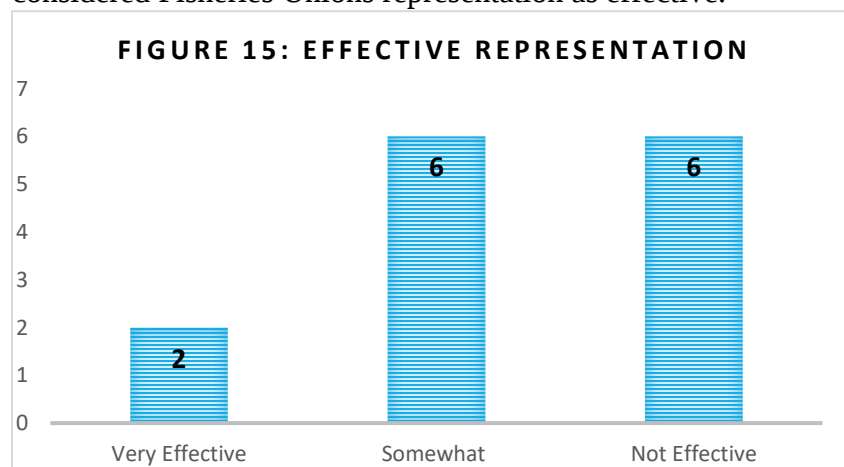
⁵² Ibid, 11(5);p21

⁵³ Ibid 18(3); p25

and one community said they were “partially involved”. The low involvement of community members in policy formulation and decision making will led to challenges in implementation because the intended rights holders did not own the policy or initiative. Probing into the transparency of local decision-making, respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the mechanisms to facilitate the meaningful participation of SSF in local planning to develop the coast and how to protect and use marine resources and the ocean. In some communities, they blamed the direct interference of public officials from MFMR into their domestic politics in the election or selection of master fisherman and even harbor masters.

Effective Representative and the Role of SSF Unions: Sierra Leone has fragmented SSF Unions namely: The Sierra Leone Artisanal Fishermen Union (SLAFU), Sierra Leone Amalgamated Artisanal fishermen Union (SLAAFU), Sierra Leone Indigenous Artisanal Fishermen Union (SLIAFU), Sierra Leone Artisanal Fishers Consortium Union (SLAFCU), the Gbara Fish Women Association (GFWA) and the Sierra Leone Women in Fisheries Union (SLWFU), which is the national chapter of AWFishNet. These unions seem to be only known and operational in some fishing communities in the Western Urban and Western Rural. Most of the respondents engaged particularly in rural fishing communities expressed little knowledge about the existence and operations of the various SSF Unions which clearly shows a representation gap.

The result in Figure 15 shows that 43% of the fishing communities did not recognise fisheries unions as effective representation while another 43% said somewhat effective and only 14% (2) considered Fisheries Unions representation as effective.



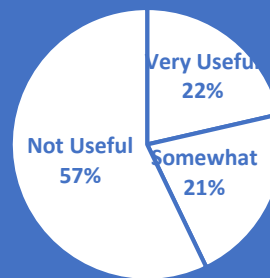
In a key informant interview (KII) with one of the Unions’ head as to why SSF Unions are not effective, he pointed to both internal and external factors. Internally, he said, SSF Unions in Sierra Leone, including SLAFU established in 2001, have struggled to achieve meaningful impact

despite their clear mandate to advance the social, economic, and professional interests of artisanal fishers. While the union holds a collective bargaining certificate from the Ministry of Labour since 2009 and had consistently advocated for fishers welfare and sustainable marine resource management, its effectiveness remains severely hampered by a fundamental tension in its mission. The organization’s commitment to combating illegal fishing across both industrial and artisanal sectors has inadvertently created friction within its own membership base, as many artisanal fishers

themselves engage in bad fishing and unsustainable practices such as the use of destructive nets, fishing in prohibited areas and harvesting undersized species to survive economically.

This internal conflict between enforcement and representation, he said, has diluted the union's credibility, weakened collective solidarity, and diverted limited resources away from bargaining for better prices, access to credit, cold storage infrastructure, and social protections that would genuinely alleviate the livelihoods of its members. It is no surprise that the result as presented in figure 16 shows that 57% of FGD community participants did not see

FIGURE 16: THE ROLE OF SSF UNIONS IN FACILITATING SSF REPRESENTATION



SSF Unions as useful in seeking their (SSF) interests, while 21% said 'somewhat useful' and 22% believed they were 'very useful'. In response to this result, a Union Executive member reacted that their role has not been useful to many SSF because there is no cordial relationship between the Unions and the MFMR. He claimed that the Ministry undermines the effort of the Unions by interfering in its operations. For example, the manifest activities introduced by the Unions which was a source of revenue generation had been hijacked by the Ministry. He further pointed out that in an attempt to render the unions inoperable, MFMR imposed a national Master fisherman to completely usurp the role of the Unions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Strengthen SSF Organizations:** The MFMR should support the formation and capacity building of SSF associations particularly women's associations, marketing groups, and artisanal unions to ensure their effective representation in fisheries governance and management at both the local and national levels.
2. **Ensure Inclusive Policy-Making:** MFMR should actively involve women and youth in policy-making processes, local area plans, and zoning decisions in order to ensure that their perspectives are heard and integrated.
3. **Promote Co-Management:** MFMR should fully implement co-management structures that delegate management responsibilities to local authorities and CMAs, thus empowering communities to take ownership of policies and initiatives.
4. MFMR should ensure gender equality and youth involvement in the leadership of the CMAs.

4.5 SSF Access to Remedy

Key International Instruments

- UDHR (Article 8, UDHR, 1948)
- United Nations ICCPR (Article 2(3): Effective remedies for rights violations.
- United Nations UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011)
- ACHPR

Human Rights Relevance

- Right to an effective remedy and compensation
- Right to access grievance and remedy mechanisms
- Right to access justice.

State Obligation

- ✓ Provide judicial and administrative remedies for fisheries-related human rights violations.
- ✓ The State must protect fishers and fishing communities from abuses by third parties such as industrial fishing companies, foreign vessels, and private investors

FINDINGS

Access to Remedy and Enforcement of SSF Zone

The Fisheries Act establishes legal protection for SSF zones and enforcement mechanisms aimed at resolving conflicts by restricting industrial encroachment and providing remedies through fines, imprisonment, and regulatory controls. It sets the IEZ, which is specifically reserved for artisanal and recreational fisheries and explicitly protects SSF from industrial fishing incursions.⁵⁴ The Act mandated the Director of Fisheries to promote development of sustainable artisanal fisheries and encourage efficient and low-impact fishing technologies.⁵⁵ It establishes the Monitoring, Control, Surveillance and Enforcement (MCSE) Department to oversee compliance with zoning and fishing regulations.⁵⁶ The Authorised officers have powers to enforce fisheries laws which include dealing with illegal entry by industrial vessels into SSF zones.⁵⁷ The Act also provides for licensing and registration of fishing vessels according to their category, which can help restrict unauthorized industrial trawlers.⁵⁸ It imposes fines and imprisonment for offences related to contravention of fisheries areas, illegal fishing or gear misuse and provides access to legal remedy⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Ibid, Section 18(1); p.25

⁵⁵ Ibid, Section 18 (2); p.25

⁵⁶ Ibid, section 19(1); p.25

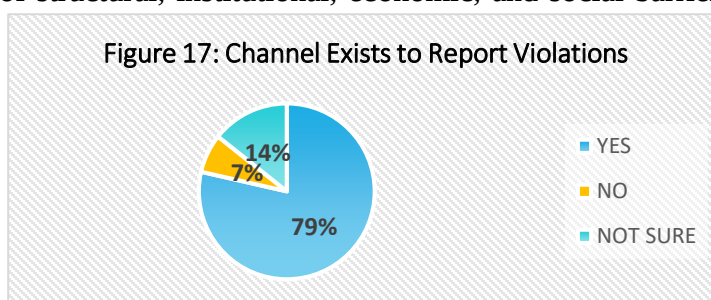
⁵⁷ Ibid, Part V, Section 21; p.27

⁵⁸ Ibid Section 16; p.24

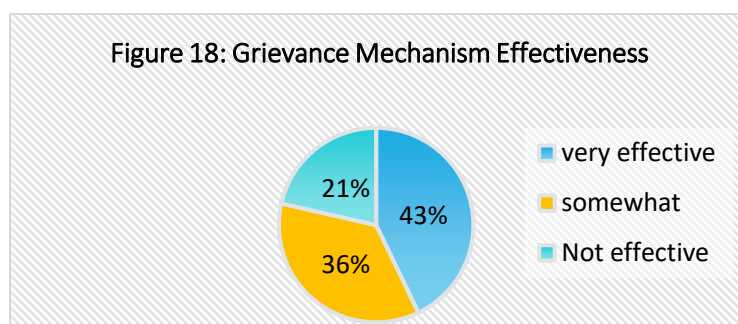
⁵⁹ Ibid, Section 64-69; pp.48-52

Access to remedy for SSF communities is still developing and uneven, but in practice there are several formal and informal pathways that fishers can use when their rights were violated. The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act provides for inspection and enforcement mechanisms, administrative sanctions for violators, judicial remedies for fisheries offences, procedures for licensing appeals and enforcement actions, and powers of authorised officers and fisheries inspectors⁶⁰. The 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone guarantees access to courts, due process, and protection of fundamental rights clearly stated from Section 15 to 30⁶¹. There are also established institutional mechanisms that include the MFMR, Local Councils, court systems, EPA and HRCSL and the Ombudsman.

The findings from the community FGDs indicate that 79% of the communalities visited acknowledged the existence of channels to report violations and 14% said they were not sure. However, SSF expressed facing a mix of structural, institutional, economic, and social barriers that limit their ability to access remedy when their rights were violated. These barriers, they said, were the very reason why many disputes remain unresolved or are handled only informally at community level. FGD participants stated that they avoid formal courts because of high cost of legal actions (lawyers, transport, court fees), and loss of income when attending hearings or pursuing complaints. SSF raised issues of limited access to legal aid in most fisheries-related disputes, and poverty makes it difficult to sustain long legal processes.



The research team observed that implementation of grievance mechanisms as provided by the Fisheries and Aquaculture Act (2018) and the Regulations of 2019 continued to be the huge gaps in solving violations committed at sea. Figure 18 shows that 43% of FGDs in selected communities rated the grievance mechanisms available to as ‘Very effective’, while 36% said ‘somewhat effective’ and 21% believed the grievance mechanism was ‘not effective’ at all.



FGD participants explained that there were limited fisheries inspectors and patrol vessels, and weak Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) coverage in remote areas where their rights were violated by foreign vessels and industrial trawlers. The common violations faced at sea included harassment and destruction of their fishing gears by trawlers with

⁶⁰ Ibid, Part VIII (Sections 62 – 78); pp. 48 -54.

⁶¹ Ibid, Chapter III, pp. 10 - 22

impunity. Other violations common with SSF communities are illegal fishing, exclusion from fishing grounds, licensing abuse, harassment and environmental harm. SSF stated that there is no support system for documenting and reporting abuses at sea. They are disappointed that the Ministry was slow to respond to reported violations and enforcement of penalties against industrial trawlers was limited or void. Therefore, even when cases were reported, follow-up was weak. For conflict among SSF, they preferred seeking customary dispute resolution over formal justice even though sometimes without fair remedy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Establish Accessible Grievance Mechanisms:** MFMR and SLMA should establish and publicise a grievance mechanism that is affordable and accessible to SSF communities in order to enable them report violations and abuses including collisions and harassments by industrial trawlers.
2. **Improve handling of sexual harassment cases:** The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MGCA) should work in collaboration with MFMR to enforce the reporting and handling of sexual harassment cases in SSF communities.
3. **Provide Legal Aid:** The Legal Aid Board should extend legal aid services to coastal communities to overcome cost and distance barriers to accessing courts and legal remedies.
4. **Ensure Government Transparency in Disputes Resolution:** MFMR, NMA & EPA should improve transparency in government handling of disputes between SSF and industrial trawlers or mining companies, ensuring impartial resolution and holding all parties accountable.

4.6 Social Development

Key International Instruments

- ICESCR Article 9 right to social security (elaborated in CESCR General Comment 19) and also Art. 12 right to health, Art. 13 right to education, Art. 11 food, housing, water and sanitation as part of an adequate standard of living.
- United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, Articles 11, 13, 14) - 1979)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, Articles 19, 26, 27)- 1989)
- CRPD, Article 28 (Adequate standard of living and social protection)
- FAO SSF Guidelines (2015) - Social development, gender equality, healthcare, education, and poverty reduction.

Human Rights Relevance

- Right to development (African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights)
- Right to social security
- Right to education
- Right to health
- Right to an adequate standard of living

State Obligation

- Promote social welfare, gender equality, healthcare and decent living standards in fishing communities.
- Developing fisheries infrastructure such as landing sites, cold storage facilities and markets.
- Providing education, training and extension services.
- Supporting access to credit and financial services.
- Promoting sustainable fisheries management.
- Ensuring access to social protection and education for fishing communities.
- Strengthening disaster preparedness and climate adaptation measures

FINDINGS

Social Protection for SSF Communities

The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act provides for institutional recognition and organization of SSF which can be a platform for social protection expansion. The current Act indeed recognizes artisanal fisheries in the IEZ protected for subsistence and sustenance livelihoods.⁶² It encourages formation of fisheries marketing associations and community fisheries groups to enhance social

⁶² Ibid, Section 18(10), p.25

organization and economic resilience.⁶³ It provides for licensing and registration, which facilitates formal recognition and potential access to fisheries management benefits.⁶⁴ However, explicit social protection measures such as welfare, health, insurance and safety nets for SSF communities are not detailed in the Act. The Act's recognition of Community Fisheries Management Associations and collaboration with Local Councils⁶⁵ can be leveraged for delivering social support services but needs enabling policies beyond fisheries. Therefore, there is need for specific social protection statutory schemes for SSF to be developed externally.

The fisheries policy contains a dedicated priority area on: social development, decent employment, gender equality, and improvement of living conditions in fishing communities. The policy covers human rights related areas such as education, health, occupational safety, capacity building, and employment creation. It also recognizes fisheries as a livelihood sector, not merely a production sector; and addresses gender issues and decent work. The Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991, provides broad socio-economic objectives relating to welfare, social justice, and human development. In Section 15, it further provides fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual, including right to life, liberty, security of person, the enjoyment of property, and the protection by law; freedom of conscience, expression and assembly and association; respect for private and family life, and protection from deprivation of property without compensation. However, the application and effectiveness of these laws continue to be the huge challenge as ascertained from the community data collection below.

Existing challenges related to adequate standard of living: Conversely to the provision of the legal instruments, most of the economic and social rights provisions in the Constitution are policy commitments rather than enforceable legal rights. Nevertheless, rights such as the right to social security, health and food, are in legally binding international and regional instruments that Sierra Leone has ratified. The African Commission has clarified that “all rights recognised in the ACHPR must be made effective under national legal systems. Violation of economic, social and cultural rights protected under the ACHPR must entitle affected individuals and peoples to effective remedies and redress under domestic law. A rigid classification of economic, social and cultural rights which puts them, by definition, beyond the reach of the courts would be incompatible with the principle that human rights are indivisible and interdependent.”⁶⁶

The FGD reveals that coastal communities continue to face inadequate access to healthcare, sanitation, education and food security. Although there is a National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NASSIT) scheme that provides for retirement and other benefits to meet the contingency

⁶³ Ibid, Section 18(3); p.25

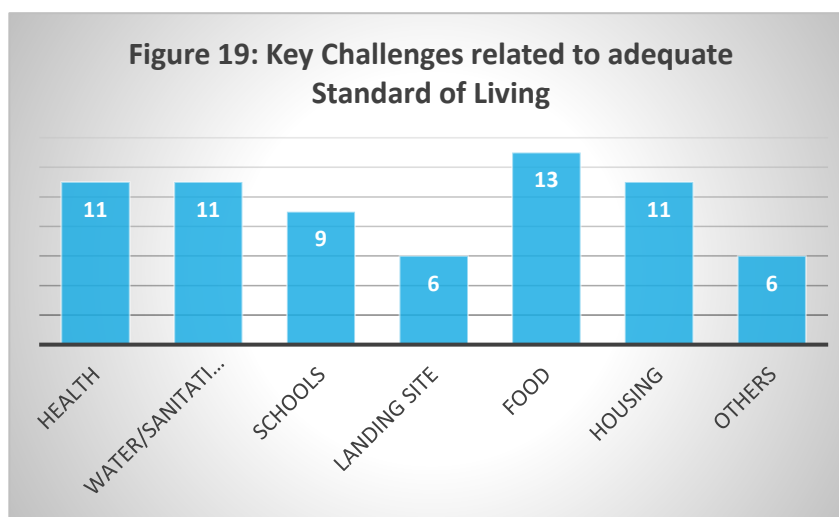
⁶⁴ Ibid, Part IV; p.39

⁶⁵ Ibid, Section 3(f); p

⁶⁶ Guidelines and Principles on ESC Rights in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2011; para21, p14

needs of workers and their dependents, Social Protection for SSF was lacking. SSF fall within the self-employed category which means that joining NASSIT was optional. Awareness raising to join NASSIT was important but lacking.

Figure 19 delineates the persisting challenges related to access to food and essential services including clean water and sanitation, health services, education, housing, fishing landing sites and sustainable energy sources. While few fishing communities looked better organised to overcome these challenges, the majority of them were not. Respondents from Gbangbatoke and Banana Island, for example, said that they did not have a formal



social security but local community saving clubs to help members in need during sickness, death, marriage, naming ceremony etc. They noted the availability of adequate housing, water and sanitation, schools, health facility and landing sites. In the case of Yargoi, Mopaala, Yelebuya Island they raised the issue of no form of social security to help members in terms of need. They also expressed bad road networks, no health post in those fishing villages and limited medical facility in the nearby community health centres.

Access to Community Financial Services: Although Sierra Leone has various community-based financial mechanisms including Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), Financial Services Associations (FSAs), Community Banks, and informal savings schemes (Osusu), access among the surveyed coastal communities was extremely limited. Of the 14 fishing communities consulted across the three coastal districts of Moyamba, Port Loko, and the Western Area, only 2 communities reported having access to an organised community financial service. This result is no surprise because most interventions were project-based and geographically limited. Many VSLAs in coastal communities, for example, were established through specific donor projects rather than as a nationwide system. This suggests a significant gap between the availability of financial inclusion initiatives at the national level and their accessibility to small-scale fishing communities. Limited access to financial services may constrain fishers' ability to invest in productive assets, diversify livelihoods, cope with shocks, and improve household welfare.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Expand Social Protection Schemes:** In alignment with the SSF Guideline,⁶⁷ MFMR and NASSIT should make social protection systems available for all SSF, both women and men working along the SSF value chain.
2. **Improve Access to Essential Services:** GoSL and Development Partner should invest in and improve access to healthcare, sanitation, education, and sustainable energy sources in coastal fishing communities.
3. **Provide Alternative Livelihoods:** MFMR and development partners should develop and implement community empowerment programmes that offer alternative income sources, especially for women in order to reduce reliance on fishing during closed seasons and mitigate the impact of seasonal patterns on income.
4. **Support Market Access & Infrastructure:** Government should mobilise domestic resources through the setting aside of a certain percentage of revenue from industrial fishing licenses, seek support from World Bank and other development partners in order to improve road networks and transportation to facilitate better market access for artisanal fishers and their products as well as to invest in fish processing facilities to add value to catches and reduce post-harvest losses.

⁶⁷ Ibid, Section 6.3

4.7 Gender Equality: Women's Role in Fisheries, Tenure Rights, and Governance

Key International Instruments

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries
- Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests
- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (especially SDGs 5, 8, 10 and 14)
- ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (C190)

Human Rights Relevance

- Equality and non-discrimination
- Equal participation in fisheries governance and decision-making
- Women's access to fisheries resources and tenure rights
- Secure land, fisheries and coastal resource tenure
- Access to fishing licenses and permits
- Access to credit, finance and productive resources
- Access to training, education and technology
- Access to markets and fisheries value chains
- Social protection and occupational safety
- Freedom from gender-based violence and harassment
- Access to justice and effective remedies
- Women's leadership and representation
- Availability of sex-disaggregated fisheries data

State Obligations

- Eliminate discriminatory laws, policies and practices that limit women's rights in fisheries, tenure and governance (State obligation to Respect).
- Prevent discrimination, violence and exploitation by State and non-State actors, and safeguard women's legitimate tenure rights (State obligation to Protect).
- Adopt and implement gender-responsive laws, policies and programmes; ensure equal access to fisheries resources, licenses, finance, markets, training and leadership opportunities; strengthen women's participation in decision-making; provide social protection and effective remedies for rights violations (State obligation to Fulfil).

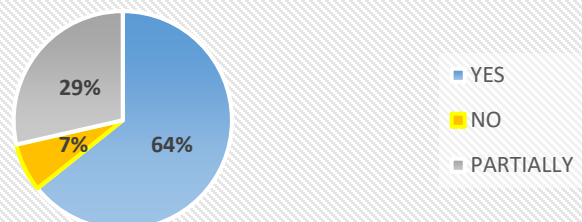
FINDINGS

The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, 2018 does not explicitly mention gender equality or women's specific rights in fishing activities, governance or resource tenure. However, provisions for CFMAs and CMA offer an institutional entry point for women's involvement in local management if community norms and policies encourage inclusion. The encouragement for artisanal fishers' associations and community organization⁶⁸ could be vehicles to promote women's participation and knowledge-sharing if designed inclusively. Ecosystem and community-based approaches were generally compatible with recognizing women's roles in sustainable use and governance. It was obvious that gender mainstreaming would require additional regulations, policies, and programs beyond the current Act to actively enhance women's tenure rights and leadership. Therefore, while the Act creates enabling structures for community participation, explicit gender-responsive measures and rights protections were absent and would need to be integrated through complementary policies.

Rights to Equality and Non-Discrimination: In spite of the progressive laws passed by the Sierra Leone government to protect women and children such as the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Act (2022), the sexual offences Act 2012 as Amended 2019, Domestic Violence Act of 2007, and the Child Rights Act of 2007, women and children continue to be more vulnerable to sexual harassment and exploitation in fishing communities. In all the communities visited, women reported of facing specific restrictions in relation to fisheries activities such as being barred from going fishing, restricted from fish landing sites with untied head, and when a woman was on her menstrual circle.

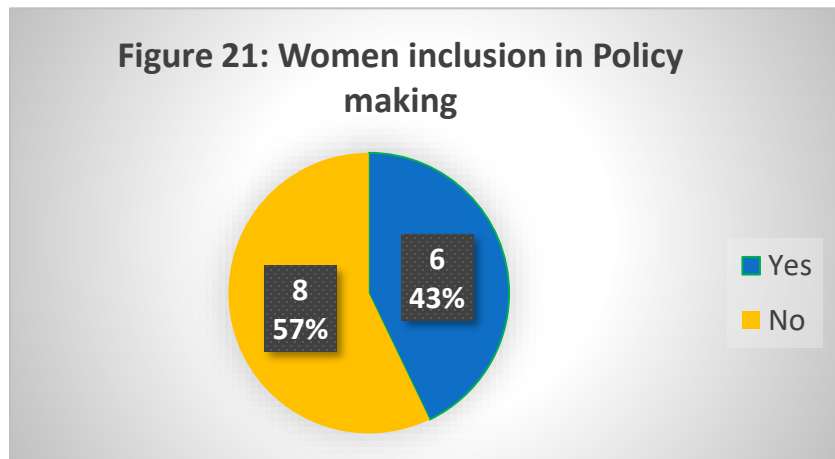
The result in Figure 20, shows that women face specific restriction to fisheries activities in 64% of the fishing communities engaged, while 29% of them said they were partially restricted and only 7% said they were not restricted. During HRCSL's interaction with fishing communities, some women openly reported that they were sexually and financially exploited to acquire their only means of livelihood (fish) particularly when there is low catch, where they were forced to exchange sex for fish -(sex –for-fish). They also reported that the harsh economic challenges was a contributing factor for the high rate of child labor, school dropouts and teenage pregnancies in these communities as most children abandoned schools to go fishing to support their parents in daily subsistent livelihood.

Figure 20: Women facing specific Restriction to Fisheries Activities



⁶⁸ Ibid, sec18 (3); p25

Women inclusion: women play a pivotal role in the fishing value chain. They were actively involved in the postharvest stage and also as boat owners. Most of the women interviewed explained that they were not fully included in policy-making such as local area plans and zoning, noting that it was one sided and that they were only informed after actions had been taken by the government Ministry or agency. Among the 14 communities which participated in the focus group discussions, 57% of them denied that women were included in policy-making decisions while 43% acknowledged being involved through their husbands, community chiefs and women representatives. One of the women at Mopaala expressed frustration over a decision of criminalizing the cutting of mangrove, which according to



her has affected women who solely depend on the mangroves woods for preserving their fish. She said that this decision was taken without full consultation with women to discuss an alternative means of drying their fish. However, Andrew Baio (2025) stated that recently, women's groups had been formed, such as the Sierra Leone Chapter of the African Women Fish Processors and Fish Traders Network (AWFishNet) known as Sierra Leone Women in Fisheries, which may improve participation in the future if this is successfully scaled up and rendered effective.⁶⁹

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Develop and Integrate Gender-Responsive Policies:** MFMR should review Fisheries and Aquaculture Act 2018 to incorporate explicit gender equality provisions that recognise and protect women's specific rights in fishing activities, governance, and resource tenure.
- 2. Enhance Women's Participation and Leadership:** MFMR should establish formal mechanisms to include women in all levels of decision-making, including community fisheries management associations and policy development processes; and support and scale up women's groups like the African Women Fish Processors and Fish Traders Network (AWFishNet) to amplify women's voices and leadership in fisheries governance.
- 3. Address Social and Cultural Barriers:** MFMR and MGCA, in collaboration with HRCSL, should engage in robust community sensitisation campaigns aimed at reducing discriminatory customs such as restrictions on women's presence at landing sites during menstruation, and combat gender-based violence including "sex-for-fish" exploitation.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.17

4. **Increase Access to Productive Resources and Services:** MFMR should facilitate women's access to fishing licenses, credit, training, technology, and markets to strengthen their economic empowerment within fisheries value chains.
5. **Improve Data Collection and monitoring:** MFMR should institutionalise sex-disaggregated data collection on fisheries participation and impact to better inform policy and program design targeted at women fishers.
6. **Provide Capacity-Building and Awareness:** MFMR in collaboration with HRCSL should provide trainings for MFMR staff, SSF Union Members and community fisheries leaders on

Key International Instruments

- ICCPR (Art. 6 right to life), ICESCR (Art. 11 right to food, housing, water), ACHPR (Art. 24 on a general satisfactory environment)
- United Nations Paris Agreement (2015) - Climate adaptation and resilience.
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, 1992)
- United Nations Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030)
- Food and Agriculture Organization SSF Guidelines (2015)
- United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, 1992)

Human Rights Relevance:

- Right to life, food and housing
- Right to a healthy environment
- Rights of future generations
- Right to housing

State Obligation

- Protect fishing communities from climate-related risks, strengthen resilience, support adaptation, and reduce disaster vulnerability.
- Protecting marine ecosystems and biodiversity, combating climate change impacts on fisheries, and applying the precautionary and ecosystem approaches to fisheries management

FINDINGS

Relocation crisis for SSF due to sea level rises & addressing acute situations

Climate change has become the greatest threat to livelihood of SSF, coastal and Islands fishing communities. As sea level rise is picking up speed due to global climate change, low lying coastal areas and islands are increasingly submerging. This is already impacting the communities of Yelebuya, Turtle, and Plantain islands. The situation calls for urgent State action to identify immediate adaptation options to preserve communities and relocation support if livelihoods and cultures on the islands cannot adapt and be preserved.

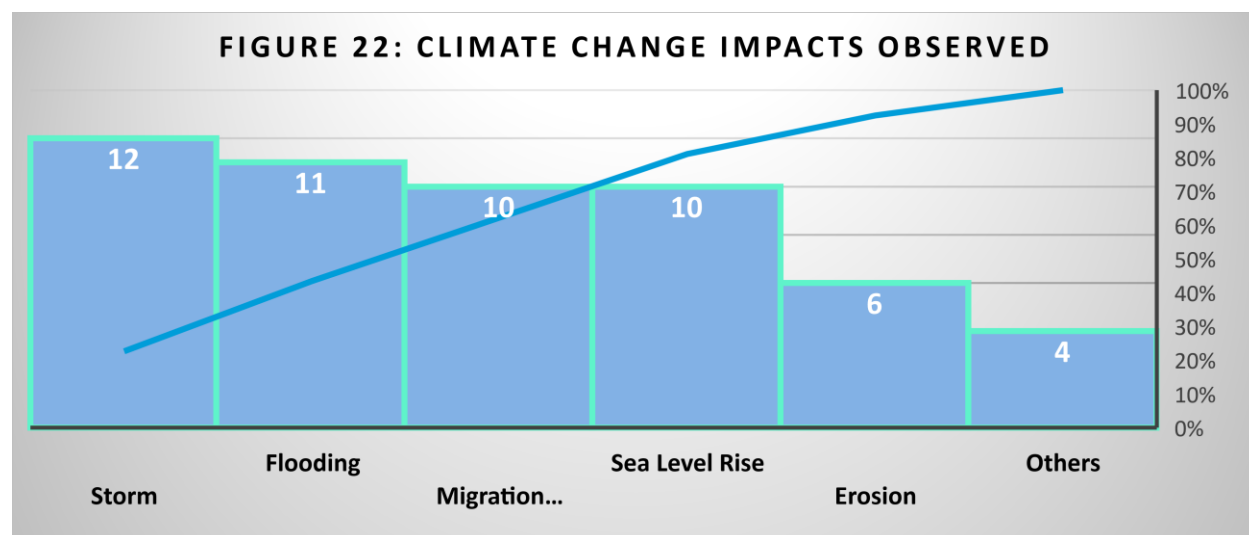
While the Fisheries Act does not explicitly address climate-induced relocation, the 'ecosystem approach to fisheries' definition implicitly encourages sustainable resource management adjusting

to environmental changes⁷⁰. The emphasis on consultation with Local Councils and CFMAs⁷¹ provides scope for participatory adaptation planning with affected communities.

The Fisheries Policy (2016) supports sustainable fisheries resource management, ecosystem resilience, adaptation measures for fisheries development, and improved governance of fisheries ecosystems. The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act (2018) Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries provides a foundation for climate adaptation by promoting habitat conservation, biodiversity and protection, and sustainable resource use. The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, the EPA and other relevant Ministries were responsible for climate adaptation planning, environmental protection and coastal zone management.

In spite of these legal and institutional provisions, climate change is not comprehensively mainstreamed throughout fisheries legislation. There is limited legal and effective institutional provisions to address challenges emanating from sea-level rises, coastal erosion, and extreme weather impacts on fishers. There is low fisheries disaster preparedness at community level, and there is need for stronger climate adaptation programmes for SSF communities.

Impact of climate change and climate-induced disaster: The impact of climate change and climate-induced disaster and other environmental factors were felt across the communities. Figure 23 shows the percentage of communities affected by each climate change impact reported in the 14 communities. The result indicates that over the years, SSF communities continued to experience a decline in the weather pattern and changing sea levels due to extreme storm in 12 communities (86%), torrential rainfall leading to flash floods (79%), migration from sinking Islands (70%), high sea level rises (70%), erosion (43%), salt water intrusion and land degradation (29%).



⁷⁰ Ibid, p.6

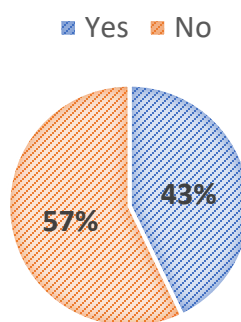
⁷¹ Ibid, Section3 (f); 11(5); p.14, 21

Community accessibility of early warnings: The national Climate Information, Disaster Management and Early Warning Systems (CIDMEWS) was established to provide weather, climate, flood, and disaster warnings through collaboration between the government, the meteorological agency, and disaster management institutions⁷². The Sierra Leone Meteorological Agency (SLMet) provides marine weather forecasts, sea-state information, and warnings specifically intended for fishers, coastal communities, and maritime users⁷³. The NDMA and partners have implemented Community-Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) and conducted awareness raising activities in coastal communities such as Tombo, Shenge, Bonthe Island, and Konakry-Dee⁷⁴.

Despite the above progressive initiatives, FGD participants indicated that access to and utilization of climate and disaster early warning information remains limited in many coastal and island fishing communities.

In Figure 23, of the 14 fishing coastal and island communities consulted: 8 (57%) communities reported that early warning systems were not accessible to them, while 6 (43%) communities reported that early warning information was accessible. This suggests that a majority of communities lack access to

FIGURE 23: EARLY WARNING ACCESSIBLE



timely weather and disaster information, reducing their ability to prepare for and respond to climate-related hazards such as storms, flooding, coastal erosion, and rough sea conditions. Consequently, the existence of early warning systems has not yet translated into a strong perception of community preparedness for climate-induced disasters.

Community Readiness: In Figure 24, participants rated community readiness to climate change impacts as “Low” in 7 communities, “Medium” in 5, and “High” in 2 communities. The fact that 50% (7 of 14 communities) rated community readiness as low suggests that many communities perceived significant weaknesses in their ability to anticipate, withstand, and recover from climate-induced disasters. The 5 communities rating themselves as medium indicate that some coping mechanisms such as community solidarity, local leadership, or previous experience dealing with hazards existed, but these were still viewed as inadequate for major climate events. The two

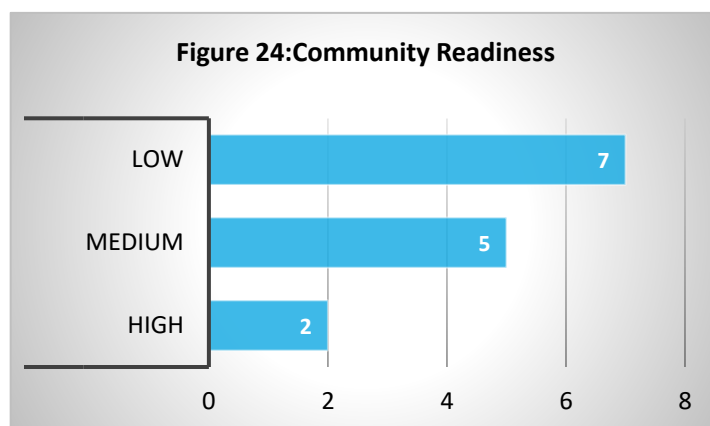
⁷² <https://www.cidmews-sl.solutions/p.1>

⁷³ [Sierra Leone Meteorological Agency](#)

⁷⁴ <https://www.cidmews-sl.solutions/>

communities rating them as high were from the Western Area. They had some advantages such as: better access to financial services; stronger community organizations; greater NGO or government support and better infrastructure.

The predominance of low readiness ratings among coastal and island fishing communities suggests that climate vulnerability remains high. In Yelebuya, Ricketts and other Islands, participants associated low readiness with inadequate access to financial resources, weak infrastructure, limited disaster preparedness mechanisms, insufficient climate information, and heavy dependence on fisheries-based livelihoods. These factors reduced the communities' capacity to anticipate, respond to, and recover from climate-induced disasters such as flooding, coastal erosion, and severe storms. The findings indicate a need for strengthened community-based disaster preparedness, climate adaptation support, and improved access to finance, and greater investment in resilient coastal infrastructure.



Community Climate Change Adaptation Measures: the FGDs revealed that many communities reported low readiness for climate-induced disasters, which indicates that while adaptation measures existed in policy or projects initiatives, they were not yet sufficiently accessible, funded, and institutionalised at the community level. The gaps identified included limited early warning access, inadequate financial support, weak community disaster planning, and insufficient livelihood diversification. In some of the communities, the local adaptation measures available to them included mangrove planting and engaging in alternative livelihoods like farming and trading to minimize the impact. Some of communities acknowledged certain efforts made by government and few NGOs such as RAP Salone and A.C.I in supporting them in planting mangrove trees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Strengthen Early Warning Systems:** SLMeT, EPA and SLMTA should implement and ensure accessibility of early warning systems for disaster and climate-related risks (e.g., storms, flooding, and sea level rises) in all SSF communities.
- 2. EPA , ONS and NDMA should conduct analyses** of anticipated climate displacement, determine likely **time frames** and **identify communities at risk and possible relocation sites**.
- 3. Develop Climate Adaptation Programmes:** EPA and MFMR should create and fund stronger climate adaptation programmes for SSF communities, including support for alternative livelihoods and mangrove protection and planting. Where communities are

particularly vulnerable, such as those living on or near waterways and shorelines, priority should be given to **adaptation measures to preserve existing communities** initiatives.

4. **Mainstream Climate Change in Legislation:** MFMR and MoECC should integrate explicit provisions addressing climate-induced relocation, sea-level rises, coastal erosions, and extreme weather impacts into fisheries legislation and policies.
5. **Relocation of SSF from Sinking Islands:** MLCP and NDMA should facilitate the relocation of fishing communities from sinking islands such as Yelebuya, Turtle Island and Plantain Island to prevent loss of lives from the impact of climate change.



GROUP PHOTO AT A STAKEHOLDERS WORKSHOP ON REPORT VALIDATION - PHOTO BY HRCSL MEDIA

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary Findings

5.1.1 Summary Findings in relation to Legal Framework

National Framework - Sierra Leone has a relatively robust legal framework, including the *Constitution of Sierra Leone (1991)*, the *Fisheries and Aquaculture Act (2018)*, and various environmental and labor laws. These align with international obligations like the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and UN SDGs.

The Constitution of Sierra Leone (1991) protects rights to livelihood and food security, mandates natural resource management, and promotes environmental protection. However, it lacks explicit recognition of fisheries resources or enforceable substantive and procedural rights for community fisheries management as the main gaps.

The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act (2018) is the principal legislation aimed at sustainable management, combating IUU fishing, and enhancing food security. It establishes Inshore Exclusion Zones (IEZ) for artisanal fishers, promotes community involvement, and provides for enforcement. While the Act supports conservation, social protection, addresses relocation crisis implicitly, promotes participation, and offers access to remedy, significant gaps exist. Explicit social protection measures for SSF are lacking, gender equality provisions are not explicit, and enforcement of the IEZ against industrial encroachment is weak.

Other legislation such as the *Sierra Leone Maritime Administration Act (2000)*, *Environmental Protection Act (2022)*, *National Protected Areas Authority Act (2012)*, *Forestry (Amendment) Act (2022)*, *Employment Act (2023)*, and *NASSIT Act (2001)* provide supporting frameworks but also suffer from enforcement limitations, low awareness, and incomplete coverage for SSF.

International and Regional Frameworks - Sierra Leone has ratified numerous international conventions and adopted guidelines relevant to human rights-based fisheries management (e.g., UDHR, ICCPR, ACHPR, UNCLOS, FAO SSF Guidelines). Despite a strong legislative basis, implementation challenges persist, particularly in tenure security, social protection, access to justice for remote communities, gender inclusion, enforcement, and climate change adaptation.

5.1.2 Summary Findings in relation to Outcomes of the Community Data collection

HRCSL engaged 14 fishing communities across six districts, revealing critical issues summarized in the matrix table below: I'm not sure why some abbreviations are introduced again in this table. Is there a reason for what? We normally only introduce abbreviations one time.

Fisheries Theme	Fisheries Issue/Indicator	Findings
1. Fisheries Livelihood and Fishing Activities	SSF Conflict with Industrial Trawlers	79% of communities reported conflicts, including destruction of fishing gear by foreign and mining company vessels, with little action taken by authorities.
	Fish Stock Trends	93% reported a drastic decrease in fish catch, attributed to harsh weather, bad fishing methods, and industrial trawlers invading the IEZ.
	Seasonal Patterns	93% of SSF livelihoods are severely affected by increased fuel costs, scarcity of gear, and poor market access
	Closed Season	Negatively impacts livelihoods due to a lack of alternative income, particularly for women. Harassment by marine officers and exorbitant penalties for confiscated gear were also reported.
2. Responsible Governance of Tenure and Fisheries Resources	Community Awareness of Rules/policies	Awareness of fisheries laws and rights is low; 36% are unaware, and 36% partially aware. Rural communities feel excluded from decision-making processes.
	Enforcement Effectiveness	50% found enforcement 'fairly effective,' while 36% described it as 'very effective but with bias,' noting SSF are penalized more readily than industrial trawlers for similar violations.
	Licensing	43% of communities were unsure about transparency in licensing, citing delays and lack of consultation on fee increases. Women and non-boat owners often lack support provided to licenses holders by MFMR during closed seasons.
3. Sustainable Fishery Resource Management	Conservation Decision-Making	71% of communities believe conservation decisions are solely government-driven, with industrial fishers frequently flouting rules in restricted areas
	Fair Application of Conservation Rules	93% reported unfair application, with SSF facing stricter penalties than industrial fishers.
	Community involvement in Habitat Protection	Community involvement in habitat protection is low (only 14% involved), indicating the ineffectiveness of Community Fisheries Management Associations (CFMAs).
	Pollution and Degradation	All communities reporting of plastic waste (100%), significant deforestation/land degradation (93%), seaweeds (79%), sand mining (43%), and mining activities (36%) as major threats. No evidence of legal action against polluters.

	IUU Fishing, Overfishing, Depletion	71% of communities face these challenges, linking them to bad fishing methods, water pollution, and mining activities. Community Management Associations (CMAs) lack support to address illegal fishing
4. Participation of SSF in Fisheries Management	National Policy Making	Only 43% of communities reported involvement in national policy-making, with dissatisfaction regarding transparency and perceived interference from the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR) in local politics
	Women Inclusion	57% of women reported exclusion from policy-making. Decisions like criminalizing mangrove cutting disproportionately affect women who rely on it for fish preservation, without alternative solutions
	SSF Unions Representation	43% do not recognize fisheries unions as effective. Unions face internal conflicts (balancing enforcement with members' interests) and external challenges (MFMR undermining their roles), leading to 57% of communities finding them 'Not Useful'
5. SSF Access to Remedy	Channels to Report Violations	79% of communities acknowledge existing channels, but face structural, institutional, economic, and social barriers (high costs, loss of income, limited legal aid etc.).
	Grievance Mechanism Effectiveness	43% rated mechanisms as 'Very effective,' 36% 'somewhat,' and 21% 'not effective.' Limited fisheries inspectors, patrol vessels, and weak Monitoring, Control, Surveillance, and Enforcement (MCS) coverage were cited among the challenges of effective grievance mechanisms.
	Violations	Common violations reported include harassment, destruction of gear by industrial trawlers, illegal fishing, and exclusion from fishing grounds, with slow ministerial response
6. Social Development	Adequate Standard of Living	Despite policy commitments and progressive laws, coastal communities face inadequate access to healthcare, sanitation, education, and food security. The National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NASSIT) has low coverage for artisanal fishers, being optional for the self-employed
	Community Financial Services	Only 2 out of 14 communities had access to organized community financial services, limiting investment, livelihood diversification, and shock resilience.

7. Gender equality	Equality and Non-Discrimination	Women and children remain vulnerable, with women facing specific restrictions in fishing activities and experiencing sexual/financial exploitation, leading to high rates of crimes and gender-based violence, child labor, school dropouts, and teenage pregnancies
8. Disaster Risks and Climate Change Impacts	Climate-Induced Disasters	Communities reported experiencing extreme storms (86%), torrential rainfall/flash floods (79%), and migration from sinking islands (70%), high sea level rise (70%), erosion (43%), and saltwater intrusion/land degradation (29%).
	Early Warning Accessibility	57% of communities do not have access to early warning systems, reducing their ability to prepare for climate-related hazards.
	Community Readiness	50% of communities rated their readiness to climate change impacts as 'Low', indicating significant weaknesses in anticipation, resistance, and recovery from disasters
	Adaptation Measures	Low readiness is linked to inadequate financial resources, weak infrastructure, limited preparedness, and insufficient climate information. While some local measures like mangrove planting and alternative livelihoods exist, these are not sufficiently accessible or institutionalized.

5.2 Conclusion & Next Steps

Sierra Leone has a relatively strong legal framework for fisheries governance, including the Constitution (1991), Fisheries and Aquaculture Act (2018), and environmental and labor laws. These are aligned with international obligations such as the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and UN SDGs. However, there are gaps such as limited enforcement capacity, poor awareness among small-scale fishers (SSF), weak social protection and gender equality provisions, lack of fully enforceable community rights, and challenges in addressing climate change impacts.

Data collected from 14 fishing communities showed serious issues including: conflicts between SSF and industrial trawlers affecting fishing gear and livelihoods, drastic decreases in fish stocks, limited participation in decision-making, insufficient enforcement with bias against SSF, and social and economic pressures on fishing households. Access to remedies for SSF is developing but hindered by structural barriers including costs and limited legal aid. Climate change has intensified vulnerabilities through sea level rise, coastal erosion, and disasters, triggering relocation and livelihood challenges.

Next Steps include:

1. MFMR, EPA and HRCSL to engage on strategic coordination in ensuring the effective implementation of recommendations provided in this report.
2. MFMR and HRCSL to jointly design programmes gear towards enhancing the capacity of officers of the MFMR, SLMA and other conservation actors, including SSF Union, Local Government Authorities by conducting targeted training on human rights, and HRBA to fisheries and conservation.
3. HRCSL and other players to facilitate mediation between SSF Unions and MFMR to settle their long standing impasse in order to bring sanity to the SSF governance system.

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[Sierra Leone Meteorological Agency](#)

<https://www.cidmews-sl.solutions/>

APPENDIX: DATA COLLECTION TOOL



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF SIERRA LEONE

Sustainable Oceans Project in Sierra Leone

Data Collection Tools

Sustainable Oceans in Sierra Leone: An Assessment of the Fisheries Governance, Management and Coastal Conservation and Livelihood of Small-Scale Fishers/ Fishing communities from a Human Rights Perspective.

Methods of Data Collection

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Key Informant Interviews (KII)

Targeted Respondents

Fishers/Fish workers

- ★ Fishing crew
- ★ Fish traders
- ★ Boat owners
- ★ Fish processors
- ★ Harbour Masters

Other actors:

- Union representatives
- Local law enforcement
- Local Councils
- Line government Ministries & Agencies

Data Collection Plan

Focus Group Discussion Guides

- ★ Three groups – 1) Fishing Crew, 2) Boat owners & Harbour Master, and 3) Processors/traders
- ★ Each group with 3 or 5 participants
- ★ X FGD sessions in each study region

Key informant Interview Guides?

- ★ District Council authorities
- ★ Local Leaders
- ★ Law enforcement agents
- ★ SSF Union/ local organisations or associations
- ★ Fisheries Ministry's workers

Themes + Sub-themes

Based on the analytical framework

- ★ Introduction, Consent, & Respondent/Participant information

- ★ Section 1: Fisheries Livelihoods & Fishing Activities
 - ★ *Fishing activities*
 - ★ *Roles in the fisheries value chain*
- ★ Section 2: Responsible governance of tenure
 - ★ *Legitimate tenure rights to aquatic resources, land and small-scale fishing areas*
 - ★ *Preferential access*
 - ★ *Eviction, dispossession, displacement*
- ★ Section 3: Sustainable fishery resource management
 - ★ *Overfishing (Overcapacity and overexploitation of marine resources)*
 - ★ *Illegal fishing*
 - ★ *Pollution and degradation of the environment*
 - ★ *Fisheries management systems*
- ★ Section 4: Participation of SSF in fishery management
 - ★ *Participation in policymaking at national level, including women and marginalised groups*
 - ★ *Participation in decision-making at district level*
 - ★ *Co-management at local level, including women and marginalised groups*
- ★ Section 5: Access to remedy
 - ★ *Access to remedy in general*
- ★ Section 6: Social development
 - ★ *Right to social security*
 - ★ *Right to an adequate standard of living (food, water & sanitation, housing)*
 - ★ *Rights to equality and non-discrimination*
- ★ Section 7: Disaster risks and climate change
 - ★ *Impacts of climate change and disasters*

Community Visit Tools

FGD Guide

Introduction, Consent, & Participant information	
<u>Introduction</u> Introduce the team/HRCSL and the purpose of the data collection including how the information will be used and followed up on.	
<u>Consent</u> Do you provide consent to document, use, store, and share the information for reporting and communication purposes? Yes ☐ No ☐ Do you provide consent to take, use, store, and share your photos for reporting and communication purposes? Yes ☐ No ☐ (If NO, do not take photos at any time)	
<u>Participant Information</u> According to human rights principle of self-identification, we have a few basis questions to ask about <u>personal characteristics</u>. Remember that your participation is voluntary, and you are free to choose not to respond or stop at any point. Now, please raise your hand if you can answer yes to any of these questions:	
How many of you are men?	
Of the men, how many are younger than 35/older than 40?	

Of the men, have any of you migrated to this community from another region or another country? If yes, did you bring your family?	
Of the men, how many of you live permanently in this community now?	
Of the men, do any of you have a disability?	
How many of you are women?	
Of the women, how many are younger than 18 ? How many are older than 40 ?	
Of the women, how many of you live permanently in this community now?	
Of the women, have any of you migrated to this community from another region or another country? If yes, did you bring your family?	
Of the women, do any of you have a disability?	
Region	
District	
Ward	
Village	
Date	

Name of FGD Facilitator. Director Abubakarr Kamara.....

Name of FGD Note Take Alfred Papar Bangura.....

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A: RESPONDENT PROFILE

Name (optional)	Participants
Position/Role	☐ District Councilor ☐ Local Leader ☐ SSF Union/Org ☐ Fisheries Ministry/Agency ☐ Law Enforcement ☐ Fishing crew ☐ Fish traders ☐ Boat owners ☐ Fish processors, Harbour Master Response
Community / District	Yeliboya Island -Kambia
Gender	☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other
Date	11 th & 12 th December, 2025

SECTION B: FISHERIES GOVERNANCE/ MANAGEMENT THEMES

1. Fisheries Livelihood & Fishing Activities

Main fishing/livelihood activities: (Probe: <i>Which activities SSF men mostly participate in; Which activities SSF women mostly participate in; How long they have been involved in small-scale fishing</i>)	
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Top challenges- (Probe: Are any of the fishing areas part of marine parks or other protected areas?) :	1) Sanitation, _____ 2), _____ 3) _____ 4) _____
Conflicts with industrial trawlers:	☐ (Yes ☐ No
Fish stock trend:	☐ Increased ☐ Decreased ☐ Stable
How do seasonal patterns, fuel costs, gear availability, or market access affect fishing income?	☐ Very Severely ☐ Fairly ☐ Not Severely

2. Responsible Governance

Awareness of rules/rights:	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Partially
Enforcement effectiveness:	☐ Very ☐ Fairly ☐ Not effective
Transparency in licensing/enforcement:	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
What are the Governance gaps/challenges:	

3. Sustainable Fishery Resource Management

Decision-making on conservation:	☐ Gov ☐ Community ☐ Both
Fair application of conservation rules:SSF & Industrial	☐ Yes ☐ No
Habitat protection activities: Community involvement	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Aware
Pollution and degradation of the marine environment/ecosystem – (Probe: what type of pollution (plastics, mining activities, etc.) – what type of problems (e.g. deforestation and land degradation) <i>Impact on women and other marginalised groups; Efforts/initiatives to address the problem whether they are effective</i>)	☐ Yes ☐ No (If yes explain)
IUU fishing, overfishing & depletion of fish catch issues:	☐ Yes ☐ No
What are your opinions on management of marine resources in this community? (Probe: <i>Effectiveness of measures and initiatives to manage marine resources (effective or weak); Main barriers to effective management of marine resources; Recommendations to improve fisheries management</i>)	
Please share how this affect your livelihood. (Probe: <i>Overall impact for fishers, fish workers and the community of declining fishery resources on poverty and their livelihood; Specific impact on women and other marginalised groups</i>)	

4. Participation of SSF in Fisheries Management

SSF Participation in policymaking at national level, including women and marginalised groups:	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Partially
Women included:	☐ Yes ☐ No
Are there ways for small-scale fishers, men and women, to participate and give input to local area plans and zoning?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Partially
Barriers to participation:(Probe: <i>Is local decision-making transparent? Are there effective mechanisms to facilitate the meaningful participation of SSF in local spatial planning and plans/ initiatives to develop the coast and plans for how to protect and use marine resources and use the ocean? If not, what are the main barriers?</i>)	
Effectiveness of representation:	☐ Very ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not effective
How do you feel about the role of fishery's Union in facilittating the participation of SSF (Probe: <i>Effectiveness in delivering on mandate; Effectiveness of the unions; Main</i>	☐ Very Useful ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not Useful and Impactful

<i>barriers and opportunities; Any specific challenges for women and other marginalised groups before, during and after decision-making processes; Are post-harvest actors included in relevant decision-making processes?)</i>	
Are women and other marginalised groups represented in union leadership? (Probe: Availability of women leaders (few or many); Role in decision-making (whether their views are heard or respected)	Yes

5. Access to Remedy

Channels exist to report violations:	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
Grievance mechanism effectiveness:	☐ Very ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not effective
Common violations:	☐ Gear confiscation ☐ Collisions ☐ Harassment ☐ Unfair fines Quarelling/Fighting during fish trading
Do women and marginalised groups face specific barriers to accessing justice?	Yes ☐ No
If Yes; What are some of these barriers?	
Are there timely and fair remedies:	☐ Yes ☐ No
Are there support systems for documenting and reporting abuses at sea?	☐ Yes ☐ No If Yes, pls explain.....
If you have experienced disputes/conflicts regarding access to fisheries resources and landing sites, how have the disputes been resolved? (Probe: Types of dispute; Parties involved; Which mechanisms, Availability and access to such mechanisms; Effectiveness of such mechanisms; Available remedies; Key barriers to access to remedy (file complaints and have the complaint investigated and concluded); Do they expect more conflicts in the future?)	

6. Social Development

<i>Right to social security: What system of social protection is available to fishers and fish workers in this community to help them cope during times of hardship? (Probe: Access to social security/Membership to formal social security scheme; Availability of community-based financial assistance and protection to small-scale fishers e.g. during times of low catch, illness, injury, old age, or other disruptions to their livelihood; Access to social security for women and other marginalised groups, do men and women enjoy same level of access?)</i>	
<i>Right to an adequate standard of living: What are key challenges related to adequate housing, energy, food and essential services including clean water and sanitation? (Probe: Specific challenges for women and girls, persons with disabilities etc.)</i>	☐ Health ☐ Water/Sanitation ☐ Schools ☐ Landing Site ☐ Food ☐ Housing ☐ Others _____
Access to financial services:	☐ Yes ☐ No
Are there labour/gender issues:	☐ Yes ☐ No
Rights to equality and non-discrimination:	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Partially

Do women face specific restrictions in relation to fisheries activities and are their rights respected at all stages of the value chain? (Probe: Can women enter the boats? Can women safely move around without harassment? Are there cases of exploitation of women?)	
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7. Disaster Risks & Climate Change

Impacts of climate change and disasters Are you experiencing extreme weather events and or changing water levels and if yes, how are they affecting your lives? (Probe: Any examples in the last few years of extreme heat, extreme rainfall, flooding, sea level rise, saltwater intrusion, etc. What were the impacts? Any disaster preparedness or post disaster support received? If yes, was it adequate? Who benefitted – all in the community?)	☐ Yes ☐ No
Climate impacts observed:	☐ Erosion ☐ Storms ☐ Flooding ☐ Migration changes ☐ Sea level rise ☐ Others
Early warning accessible:	☐ Yes ☐ No
Adaptation measures:	☐ Mangroves protection & planting ☐ Alt livelihoods ☐ Climate-smart gear ☐ None
Community readiness:	☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low
How do government or NGO programs and initiatives or NGO assist SSF with changes in the climate? (Probe: Type of support local, regional or national; Effectiveness of such programmes and initiatives; Any early warning systems for disasters and risks? Recommendations)	

SECTION C: FINAL REFLECTIONS

Urgent actions needed:	
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