

GENDERED CONSIDERATIONS OF LAKE VICTORIA'S FISHERIES LIVELIHOODS AND ITS ROLE IN FOOD SECURITY IN SINDO, KENYA

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This research was situated on the Kenyan shores of Lake Victoria, a historically impoverished population with high rates of malnutrition and disease. Lake Victoria's main fisheries are Nile perch (*Lates niloticus*), tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*), and the silver cyprinid, known locally as omena (*Rastrineobola argentea*). Qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to examine the contribution of these fish to food security with gendered considerations. This study assessed nutrient intake for 112 people's diets, analysed 313 household livelihood and food security questionnaires, and conducted thematic analysis for 29 discussions with over 150 local people.

While this study found no gendered differences in food intake, gendered differences in livelihoods and access to fisheries' value (i.e., monetary value and value as food for consumption) were significant. While the community relied on fisheries for economic activity, positions available to women were generally high risk and low reward. Women were largely limited to low-value activities (i.e., low-value trading and processing of Nile perch, tilapias, and omena). As women played a dominant role in omena processing, this became the focus of this study. While omena processing is a low-value trade with tight margins, dried omena has disproportionate importance for local micronutrient provisioning and food security. Outside of omena processing, women lacked opportunity in other, more lucrative nodes of the omena value chain. Within the Nile perch and Nile tilapia value-chains, women lacked access to processing roles and were limited to trading, another high risk and low reward node. Very few alternative positions were available to women. Additionally, female omena dryers lacked institutional support, were omitted from leadership positions within both the household and the broader community.

Women relied on omena drying as an accessible, income-generating activity. Yet, omena was not valuable enough to trade for equally (financially nor nutritiously) valuable food. Instead, cash income from omena sales was used to purchase maize and pay for other household expenses. The omena-drying business also directly supported household food security because, unlike other fish species, some omena was retained for household consumption.

Gendered land ownership rights also existed and had consequences for women's food security. Women lacked direct access to land as a wealth resource. This created additional costs for them because they were forced to rent land or relied on poor-quality land for drying their omena. This study found a correlation between almost exclusively male-owned land and food security; thus, women's food security may be contingent on their relationships with men. This reliance has consequences for women's rights, where women omena drying participants may have chosen to stay in abusive relationships for food security, for example in sex-for-fish relationships, where women exchange sexual relations with fishers to gain access to fish.

These gendered inequalities had negative consequences for food security. Restricted opportunities for income-generating activities limited women's income-earning potential. This is a significant lost opportunity because women direct more resources towards

supporting household food security. Women's absence from many roles within the fish value chain (e.g., boat ownership, fish aggregation, local governance) and their lack of decision-making input into household decisions regarding expenditures may be the reason that economic benefits from fisheries fail to translate into improved food security and wellbeing. These findings have implications for fisheries policy and development and contribute to the evidence that research must have gendered considerations to adequately understand the role of fisheries in food security.