

The controversial role of foreign fisheries consultants in Sierra Leone's coastal waters

Abstract

The use of foreign fisheries consultants in developing countries is increasing, despite growing controversy about their value. On the one hand, they bring expertise and analytic skills, which can turn around ailing fisheries, but on the other hand, their prescriptions may be inappropriate, based on ignorance or misunderstanding of local circumstances. This study, based on results from 51 key informant interviews and 199 survey questionnaires, finds the contributions of foreign fisheries consultants in Sierra Leone of limited benefit.

Keywords: Artisanal fishing; industrial fishing; fisheries management; fisheries policy

1. Introduction

The past 40 years has seen a large expansion in the use of consultancies by governments and businesses across the world [1, 2]. In developing African countries, foreign consultants are often perceived as more expert than their local counterparts [3, 4] and as a result, foreign consultancy in Africa is 'a booming business' [5]. However, some researchers question the quality of the services offered by foreign consultants, claiming they do not understand the complexity of the problem they are contracted to advise on [6, 7]. Poor policy recommendations, project failures, deficient evaluations of the impact of projects, expenditure that is vastly over budget, and corruption are frequent allegations [1-3, 8-12]. In fisheries management in developing countries the use of foreign fisheries consultants is common [13-17]. However, despite the increasing demand for, and use of, foreign fisheries consultants (FFCs) in Africa [3, 18, 19] not many studies have been conducted to assess the efficacy of these consultants. This paper aims to help fill this gap by investigating fisheries consultancy work in industrial and artisanal fisheries in Sierra Leone's Tombo and Goderich coastal communities.

2. Sierra Leone's fisheries

The fisheries sector in Sierra Leone contributes over 10% to the country's GDP [20]. During 2014, revenue generated from this sector was calculated at US\$34 million, which is double that generated in 2013 [21]. The fisheries sector provides employment for about 8% of the country's working population, and is the main source of animal protein for local communities [22, 23]. However, during the eleven years (1991-2002) of civil war, most sectors of the country's economy, including fisheries, witnessed serious setbacks [24]. The war wasted over four decades of efforts previously invested in developing Sierra Leone's fisheries, because during it there was little or no enforcement of legislation, and very valuable fisheries data were destroyed [25]. Moreover, the civil war caused migration into coastal fishing communities, which increased the number of fishers [26]. Because of the lack of monitoring and surveillance, fishers used illegal nets such as mosquito nets and other types of small-mesh nets as well as monofilament nets and dynamite [27]. After the war ended, the government's financial position was very weak, and it could not afford to enforce fisheries regulations. Neiland et al., [21] say the Ebola epidemic in 2014-2016 may have increased the number of illegal vessels in Sierra Leone waters since during the outbreak, the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and other offices responsible for monitoring and surveillance were in lock-down [see also 28].

The fisheries sector in Sierra Leone currently faces severe problems of over-fishing. About 10% of the country's six million people depend heavily on small-scale artisanal fishing for food [25], and this puts heavy pressure on the stocks. This pressure is compounded by large-scale industrial fishing conducted mainly by foreign vessels, some of which fish legally with licenses issued by the government, but many fish without licences and constitute illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Although the total amount of fish landings in Sierra Leone is uncertain because there are few officials who collect data at landing sites [24], it is suggested that out of the estimated total annual legal production of about 150,000 tonnes, the artisanal sector produces 142,000 tonnes and the legal industrial sector (mostly foreign vessels [29]) produces 8,000 tonnes, while an amount of

53 fish estimated at a value of US\$30 million annually is taken by IUU vessels. The problem of IUU fishing is
54 acute in Sierra Leone and is blamed by observers for the alarming decline in both the number and size of fish in
55 the country's inshore waters. IUU is facilitated by Sierra Leone's very weak monitoring, control and
56 surveillance system [28, 15, 30]. This illegal fishing not only reduces fish stocks, but removes fish from local
57 markets [15, 30]. Consequently, despite its rich marine resources, Sierra Leone is one of the world's poorest
58 countries [31-35]

60 3. FFCs in Sierra Leone

61
62 In Sierra Leone, the Food and Agriculture Organization claims it has achieved much by working in partnership
63 with key ministries to deliver its priority objective for costal fisheries - food security [13, 16]. The World Bank
64 has worked with the New Partnership for Africa's Development supporting the Sierra Leone West African
65 Regional Fisheries Project, which started in August 2010 with the aim of improving the country's capacity to
66 manage its fisheries [36]. The work of foreign fisheries consultants in Sierra Leone has concentrated on two
67 fishery sectors: industrial and artisanal. Foreign fisheries consultants from the World Bank worked with the
68 Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources to develop a Joint Monitoring Centre in 2012 to track illegal fishing
69 in the industrial sector [15, 28, 37]. This initiative was successful in reducing the number of illegal trawlers by
70 over 50%. On Sierra Leone's artisanal fisheries, foreign fisheries consultants and their governmental partner, the
71 Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources claimed the West African Regional Fisheries Project was successful
72 [36, 38] in achieving a review of the 1994 Fisheries Management and Development Act and the 1995 Fisheries
73 Regulations [39], and the creation of Community Management Associations for the co-management of fisheries.
74 According to foreign fisheries consultants, the success of the Community Management Associations in
75 improving SL's artisanal fisheries was a result of the technical support they gave them [36, 38], and the New
76 Partnership for Africa's Development claims to be one of Africa's 'leading think tanks' and fisheries experts,
77 proposing innovative ideas that have improved the lives of fishing communities in Sierra Leone [40].

78
79 To evaluate these and other claims about the work of the numerous foreign fisheries consultants at work in
80 Sierra Leone, this study investigates the perception of stakeholders, based on the results of 51 semi-structured
81 key informant interviews and 199 survey questionnaires. The methods of obtaining and analysing data are
82 explained and defended in a Supplementary Material file.

86 4. Results

88 4.1 Foreign fisheries consultants' work with the industrial sector

89
90 Many respondents were critical of the efforts made by foreign fisheries consultants to reduce IUU fishing in
91 Sierra Leone waters. For instance, 40% and 58% of completed questionnaires returned from Tombo and
92 Goderich, respectively, criticized the strategies used by foreign fisheries consultants. Most key informant
93 interviewees thought the foreign fisheries consultants-recommended Joint Monitoring Centre did not do much to
94 reduce IUU fishing in Sierra Leone, and it was closed down after two years of operation due to lack of funds,
95 electricity shortages, storm damage, and unreliable internet connection [42]. Key informants blamed the failure
96 of the Joint Monitoring Centre on the fact that foreign fisheries consultants did not undertake sufficient research
97 to understand the character or trends of IUU fishing in Sierra Leone waters. For example, key informant-14, a
98 scientist, pointed out that foreign fisheries consultants persuaded the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine
99 Resources to require trawlers to install transponders, which verified their locations, but ignored the fact that
100 there was no government resource to check that the transponders were not switched off or to monitor the data
101 recorded by them. Also, foreign fisheries consultants did not acknowledge that unlicensed boats will not have
102 transponders, and the Joint Monitoring Centre lacked the capacity to carry out physical monitoring (key
103 informant-8).

4.2 Foreign fisheries consultants' work with the artisanal sector

Negative assessments of the work of foreign fisheries consultants with the artisanal fisheries included the charge by key informant-34, a fisherman from Goderich, that the ideas foreign fisheries consultants brought to the country's coastal fisheries were abstract, theoretical, and western – based on 'book knowledge' – not ideas customised for the particular circumstances of coastal fisheries in Sierra Leone, but merely designed to stop them fishing. Key informant-6, an official at the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, said recommendations from foreign fisheries consultants were not based on reliable research. Other respondents complained that the knowledge transfer model from foreign fisheries consultants was purely one-way - from foreign fisheries consultants to Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and finally to fishers - not two-way, including valuable feedback from fishers. Key informant-6 said "*it is imposition...we want foreign partners that will not impose their ideas on us. Rather we want partners that will sit with us and dialogue and work in our terms, and not in their terms, in the way that it will favour every Sierra Leonean*". Key informant-15 said that foreign fisheries consultants often acted unilaterally in a top-down manner, bypassing the Community Management Associations. He cited foreign fisheries consultants from the World Bank who repeatedly pushed their 'wealth creation' agenda despite the Ministry's opposition to it. Key informant-6 complained that foreign fisheries consultants often ignored the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources: "*World Bank will not listen to us [Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Fisheries], they do not consult us*". A further charge was that foreign fisheries consultants frequently changed their minds in the advice they gave about artisanal fisheries. For example, key informant-6 described a World Bank-sponsored project which constantly altered shape as different consultants were brought in. Also, there were reported cases of corruption and mismanagement of the West African Regional Fisheries Project [28, 42].

Foreign fisheries consultants were also criticised for recommending the establishment of the Community Management Associations without ensuring they would be provided with the funding necessary for them to do their jobs adequately: "*we [Community Management Association] are ready to work...we know our work, our only problem is money*" (key informant-9). Nor did foreign fisheries consultants check that Community Management Associations were adequately monitored in the way they performed their responsibilities. Officers of Community Management Associations were accused of turning a blind eye to illegal fishing activity. Key informant-10, an executive of the Community Management Association based in Tombo, asserted, "*the Community Management Association is not prepared for this fight. Everything is very bad, all our executives are trying to make money. They are looking for money not following the law. Now because of their interest, they put money first and not good fishing*". Indeed, managers of Community Management Associations were themselves accused of engaging in harmful or illegal fishing.

Finally, criticism was made about the so-called 'sensitization' programme recommended by foreign fisheries consultants to persuade artisanal fishers to stop using small mesh nets which caught immature fish, and monofilament nets which did not biodegrade after being lost but continued to 'ghost fish'. Whether such sensitization had any effect was doubtful. Key informant-36, a fisherman from Tombo, said "*since 2015, we have been doing sensitization so that our people [fellow fishermen] can stop bad fishing. I do not know whether we are getting results*". Key informant-23, another local fisherman from Tombo, said that despite the sensitization campaign by the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources against monofilament nets, he still used them "*the marine are the people that say we should sensitize our people to stop using bad method...I use monofilament because it catch plenty big Bonga*". In Tombo, results from the survey questionnaires showed that 67% of fishers used monofilament nets.

5. Discussion

There are four questions discussed in this section. The first is whether foreign fisheries consultants have improved Sierra Leone's artisanal fisheries, and the answer appears to be no. Foreign fisheries consultants could not sustain their Joint Monitoring Centre beyond 24 months, and there has been a steady increase in the amount of IUU fishing since its establishment in 2012 [43, 44]. Moreover, foreign fisheries consultants can be criticized

157 for failing to change the mind-set of the artisanal sector, which includes the belief that fish come from God and
158 this guarantees their continuous supply. This raises the second question, which is whether foreign fisheries
159 consultants understood Sierra Leone's coastal fisheries. The literature is insistent about the need for foreign
160 fisheries consultants to be fully aware of all the circumstances of the fisheries they purport to improve, and to be
161 in synchronisation with the perceptions and values of their clients [45], but foreign fisheries consultants in
162 Sierra Leone do not appear to have fulfilled these requirements. This may be because their communication skills
163 were inadequate, which is the issue raised by the third question. Jacobson et al., [46] claim that maintaining
164 healthy relationships between consultants and their clients is essential to ensure that projects are successful [see
165 also 4]. In the case of Sierra Leone, foreign fisheries consultants seemed to lack communication skills in relation
166 to both industrial fishermen and artisanal fishermen. In the industrial sector, according to key informant-8, a
167 local consultant attached to foreign fisheries consultants said Sierra Leonean politicians sometimes interfered in
168 communications between foreign fisheries consultants and the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources,
169 presenting counter-information to the Ministry and to industrial fishers (key informants-1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 16). In
170 the artisanal sector, most foreign fisheries consultants followed a linear progression method of knowledge
171 transfer from foreign fisheries consultants to the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, then to executives
172 of Community Management Associations, and finally to fishermen at large, but during this process, important
173 information about fishermen and from fishermen was often lost and therefore not available to improve the
174 knowledge transfer process. The fourth question is whether the experience of foreign fisheries consultants in
175 Tombo and Goderich differed. The results indicated that Goderich fishers were regarded as more responsible
176 than Tombo fishers. For example, results from the survey questionnaire indicated that while 67% of Tombo
177 fishers used monofilament nets, only 22% from Goderich did so. Yet Community Management Associations
178 were no more popular in Goderich than in Tombo, which suggests that Community Management Associations
179 (and therefore foreign fisheries consultants) are not responsible for the comparatively good behaviour of
180 Goderich fishers. What appears to have had more influence on Goderich's fishers is the high quality of
181 leadership displayed by the chairman of Capital River Warf – a local organisation that has nothing to do with
182 Goderich's Community Management Association (key informant-18).

183

184 **6. Conclusion**

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186 In conclusion, this study found evidence that foreign fisheries consultants are deeply involved in Sierra Leone's
187 artisanal and industrial fisheries, but stakeholders (local fishers, fisheries managers, and local researchers) are
188 critical of their contributions, claiming that they do not really understand the coastal fisheries, lack
189 communication skills; and base their interventions on outside perspectives. This study recommends that
190 consultancy advice offered by foreign fisheries consultants in Sierra Leone should be based on a deeper
191 understanding of the situation and views of artisanal fishers; on more rigorous research; and be subject to
192 stricter post-project appraisal, as suggested in [6].

193

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195

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