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MORAL ECONOMY AND THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ARTTISANAL MARINE FISHING INDUSTRY IN SHAMA, GHANA

Francis Aning Anokye[9]
University of Cape Coast

Henrietta Abane[10]
University of Cape Coast

Emmanuel k. Ekumah[11]
University for Cape Coast

ABSTRACT

Fishing plays an important role in the Ghanaian economy and about 10% of Ghanaians directly or indirectly make their living from the fishery sub-sector. This, notwithstanding, artisanal fishing is characterised by seasonality, rising costs of operation and diminishing catches resulting from pirate fishing by foreign trawlers, use of illegal fishing techniques and, lately, the drilling of light crude oil offshore. The main objective of this paper was to examine traditional institutional arrangements within the artisanal fishing industry in Shama, a community along the west coast of Ghana.

Emphasis was placed on social relations within the context of a moral economy that ensures that the fishing activities and livelihoods are sustained in the face of dwindling fish stocks and high expedition costs. The sustainable livelihood approach was reviewed to highlight the vulnerability context within which community livelihoods are obtained and the risk management and coping strategiesindividuals employ to deal with such vulnerabilities. Those risk coping strategies were carried out within the context of a community moral economy. A total of 33 respondents were selected by accidental and purposive sampling for the study. Interviewing, focus group discussions and non-participant observation were used for data collection and analysis. The study revealed that stakeholders in the artisanal marine fishing industry in Shama draw on family, social networks and social claims to ensure the sustainability of their livelihoods. It is through social networks and claims that the people were able to access financial capital to support their fishing businesses and cope with vulnerabilities.

Introduction

The fishing industry in Ghana accounted for 5% of the country's GDP in 2006. This declined steadily to 2.4% in 2010 (GoG, 2012; Bank of Ghana 2008). It is also estimated that 10% of Ghanaians directly or indirectly make their living from the fishery sub-sector (Kraan, 2009) and in 2010 this was estimated to be between 1.5 million and 2.2million people (Orchard and Abban 2011). Fish forms an important part of the Ghanaian's diet and constitutes 65% of protein consumed in the country (Orchard and Abban, 2011).

The marine fishing industry in Ghana can be divided into three main types: industrial deep sea, inshore and artisanal or canoe fishing (Bank of Ghana, 2008). The last type, artisanal, is integral to the culture of the ethnic groups that engage in that activity along the coast. Traditionally, it is carried out from large wooden canoes operated by a crew.

These canoes are either rowed by wooden oars by the crew or fitted with outboard engines to increase their range and reach. It is estimated that along the entire 550km stretch of Ghana's coast, there are some 12,000 canoes actively operating from 300 landing sites (Amador, Banerman. Quartey, & Ashiong, 2006).

In spite of its importance to the economy of Ghana, the diet, food security and livelihoods of coastal communities, artisanal fishing is characterized by seasonality, a phenomenon that creates seasonal unemployment. It is also plagued by rising costs of operation and diminishing catches resulting from pirate fishing by foreign trawlers, use of illegal fishing techniques and lately, the drilling of light crude oil offshore.

In addition, the very nature of the artisanal marine fishing industry – its fugitive fish resource, hostile sea environment and perishable product - makes fishing a high risk livelihood activity (MRAG, 2011). In spite of the uncertainty surrounding fishing, its risk and seasonality, fishing communities along the coast of Ghana have persisted and survived, and have resisted diversification into other income yielding livelihood activities.

This paper examines the traditional institutional arrangements within the artisanal fishing industry in Shama, a community along the west coast of Ghana. It highlights the social relations within the context of a moral economy that ensures that the fishing activity and livelihoods are sustained in the face of dwindling fish stocks and high expeditioncosts.

Literature review

Livelihood vulnerability and the artisanal fishing industry

Livelihood sustainability among rural people has been a major concern to development agencies and governments over the years. Brons, Dietz, Niehof & Witsenburg (2005)

Corresponding authors:
Francis Aning Anokye,Principal Research Assistant Department of Sociology and Anthropology University of Cape Coast
email: kaafning@yahoo.com

Henrietta Abane ,Senior Lecturer,Department of Sociology and Anthropology,University of Cape Coast email: hetabane@yahoo.com

Emmanuel K. Ekumah, Senior Research Fellow,Institute of Development Studies,University for Cape Coast, email: kodjoekumah@rocketmail.com

intimate that the concept of livelihood refers to what people do for a living, how they do it, and what they gain by doing it.

Failler andKane (2004, p. 148) define the term "livelihoods" as "all the means available to an individual or a community to enable him/it survive." They argue that when the term "sustainable" is added, it means the livelihoods are enough to guarantee a decent standard of living for future generations. For de Haan and Zoomers (2003), livelihoods is about individuals, households or groups making a living, attempting to meet their various consumption and economic necessities, coping with uncertainties, and responding to new opportunities.

According to Chambers and Conway (1991:6), "A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets, (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is sustainable, when it can cope with, and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets and provide livelihood opportunities for the next generation…" For livelihoods to be considered sustainable, they should be resilient in the face of external shocks and stresses; are not dependent upon external support; maintain the long-term productivity of natural resources; and do not undermine the livelihoods opportunities open to others, including future generations (DFID, 1999; Ellis, 1998; Chambers & Conway, 1991).

It is evident in the light of the above discussions on the concept of livelihoods that livelihoods depend on resources or assets, and that they require capabilities and must be resilient if they are to be sustainable. For most people, livelihoods are accessed within a vulnerability context. This is the capacities of different groups to anticipate and cope with risks, and the capacities of institutions to build resilience and adapt to change. Vulnerability of livelihoods has been associated with exposure to risk and hazards (Ellis, 1998); environmental and climate change (Adger, 2000); and insecurity, voicelessness and defendlessness (Devereaux, 2001; Moser, 1998).

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) (Scoones, 1998; DFID, 1999) is a useful tool to assess livelihood vulnerability. It provides a checklist of important issues and sketches out the way these are linked to one another. The approach also emphasizes the multiple interactions between various factors which affect livelihoods and draws attention to core influences and processes.

The SLA presents an external environment context in which people earn their livelihood. This context is fundamentally affected by trends, shocks and seasonality and poor people are often caught in a vicious cycle, where they are unable to cope with stresses and cannot manipulate or influence their environments.

Vulnerability and sustainability within the context of livelihoods then are at two ends of the same continuum. The most vulnerable livelihoods are those most exposed to disturbances, possess the mostlimited coping capacity and suffer the most from the impact of crisis. Vulnerable livelihoods, therefore, have limited potential for recovery from environmental disturbances.

Within the fishing industry, a number of factors have been identified to affect the vulnerability of livelihoods. Andrew, Bene, Hall, Allison, Heck and Ratner (2007) identify

physical isolation and seasonal variation in livelihood returns to constitute the two root causes of vulnerabilities in coastal communities.

Campbell (1999) identifies among others declining stocks, population increases, conflict between resource users, seasonality of fish stocks, and seasonal migration of fishermen.Climate change, particularly in South East Asia, has also been identified to make fishing a high risk activity. Islam, Sallu, Hubacek and Paalova, (2014) have observed the negative impact of cyclones and floods on the health of fishing communities in Bangladesh.

The authors have noted that these have destroyed coastal settlements and their infrastructure and have caused damage to fishing gear, canoes and landing sites. Along the coast of West Africa, foreign fishing trawlers have been noted to pirate in the waters. Such unregulated fishing activity, results in overfishing and this deprives local artisanal marine fishermen from making substantial catches (EJF, 2012).

The literature is replete with how poor households in risky or vulnerable environments have developed risk management and risk coping strategies (Abane, 2007; Devereaux, 2001; Dercon and Krishnan, 2000; Moser, 1998; Davies 1996). Risk management strategies (also known as adaptive strategies) are deliberate household strategies in response to long term trends.

They are ex-ante mitigation strategies that smooth incomes through livelihood diversification and seasonal migration. Successful adaptation means that households become less prone to crisis over time. They have improved capacity to resist shocks; they build up assets, change their asset mix, and diversify income sources (Davies, 1996).

However Dercon & Krishnan (2000) believe that the poor cannot use income diversification effectively to reduce risk and vulnerability. This is because poor house holds face entry constraints into profitable activities. Risk coping strategies are ex post, short term responses to shocks and stresses.

These include insurance mechanisms, disposal of productive assets, distress migration and community support systems that embrace informal safety nets drawing on social networks of extended family systems, friends and neighbours and wealthy patrons for assistance in times of need with or without expectations of reciprocity. In coping, households seek to deploy their different assets to best effect within their limited range of choices. This study was conducted to highlight the risk coping strategies that draw on community support.

The moral economy of traditional societies

The concept of moral economy originated in the 20th century when social historians tried to understand and offer explanations for the 18th century crowd protest against high food and grain prices in Ireland. These riots were legitimized on the grounds that they were in defence of traditional rights or customs.

The social historians argued that the food riots were scripted and morally regulated activities that expressed popular values about prices and subsistence. The concept of moral economy today has been deployed as an analytical tool to examine the survival of the subsistence ethic in peasant and rural communities in the face of the capitalist world

system's incorporation of developing societies (see Scott, 1976).

According to Scott (1976), traditional peasant societies operate within a society in which subsistence concerns and an obligation to meet the basic needs of the kinship group are prevalent. Here, peasants operate with the safety-first principle which insures against risks. Thus communities in which moral economies operate engage in relations of trust, reciprocity and exchanges between members.

This facilitates cooperation and ensures that a safety net exists to support members whose livelihoods are at risk. Hence reciprocity of exchanges acts to manage risks and gives social insurance as a buffer against the effects of shocks and adverse trends in the quest for livelihoods.

Scott's moral economy concept assumes that first, there is an extensive overlap between production and reproductive activities in society but the latter is emphasized over the former; Second, that people are not effectively captured by formal institutions due to their identity and reliance on informal institutions. Hyden (2006; 1980) argued beyond the moral economy and suggested an economy of affection within kinship relations where the subsistence principle protected communities operating in the capitalist system.

His economy of affection denotes a network of group support, communication and interaction among groups connected by blood, kin, community or other affinities and applies to patronage or traditional forms of social exchange (Lemarchand, 1989). The economy of affection assumes that affective or solidarity bonds provide the necessary social cement to hold individuals and com munities together in a variety of exchange situations. Within the context of Africa's development, Hyden's concept uncovers the embedded informal mechanisms which stand in the way of a viable state system and which conspire to create a soft state syndrome.

The economy of affection also explains the capacity of rural-based societies to remain uncaptured in the face of state efforts to regulate their economies. The concept also brings into focus the social solidarities by which rural energies can be mobilized against the state as well as helps in understanding the various forms of corruption at state level (Lemarchand, 1989). For the purposes of this study, the moral economy as an analytical construct will be used. This is because it does not deal with the vertical power relations embedded in patronage and clientelism identified in Hyden's economy of affection.

As an analytical construct, moral economy analyses the range of social considerations that allow for redistribution of opportunities and benefits in peasant societies. Redistribution is possible because peasant societies are unique with modes of production markedly different from modern capitalist societies.

They are characterised by socio-economic networks based on reciprocal relationships. At the core of the economies of peasant societies then are the concepts of reciprocity, redistribution and the right to subsistence (Scott, 1976). In the developing societies of South East Asia, , Scott (1976) identifies the prevalence of balanced reciprocity where parties reciprocate equivalents.

In Africa, Sugimura (2007) identifies the operation of generalised reciprocity which is distinct from what prevails in the give-and-

take societies of South East Asia. In Africa, the gifting that occurs is taken for granted in the expectation that rich members of the community would offer more goods and services on special occasions such as weddings and funerals.

In these developing societies, social relations become valuable productive resources and wealth is socially accumulated and redistributed in interpersonal relations through consumptive activities. The literature on sustainable livelihoods identifies the moral economy as social capital (asset), resources of networks, social claims, social relations affiliations, and associations upon which people draw when pursuing different livelihood strategies requiring coordinated actions.

Social capital is considered to be the only form of capital which can be converted into other forms of capital. With good social capital, one can access physical, natural, human, and financial capital. Social relations thoughsocial networks have in essence become a household resource crucial to obtaining goods and services as well as gaining entry into the right places. They become channels of redistribution and reciprocity.

Study setting And methodology

Shama is a coastal town and the capital of Shama District in the Western Region of Ghana. It has an estimated population of 23,298 (GoG, 2012). The landscape of the area is characterised by muddy lagoons and swampy marshlands because of the undulating topography of the area. The major drainage system of the area is the Pra River, and its tributaries within Shama make the area susceptible to flooding.

The presence of the sea and the river promoted fishing for various kinds of fish species. The economy of Shama relies mainly on the fishing fleet supported by subsistence farming activities. There are two landing sites in the town, Apow and Bentsir with a total of 549 registered canoes operating from them. Fig 1 below shows the study area.

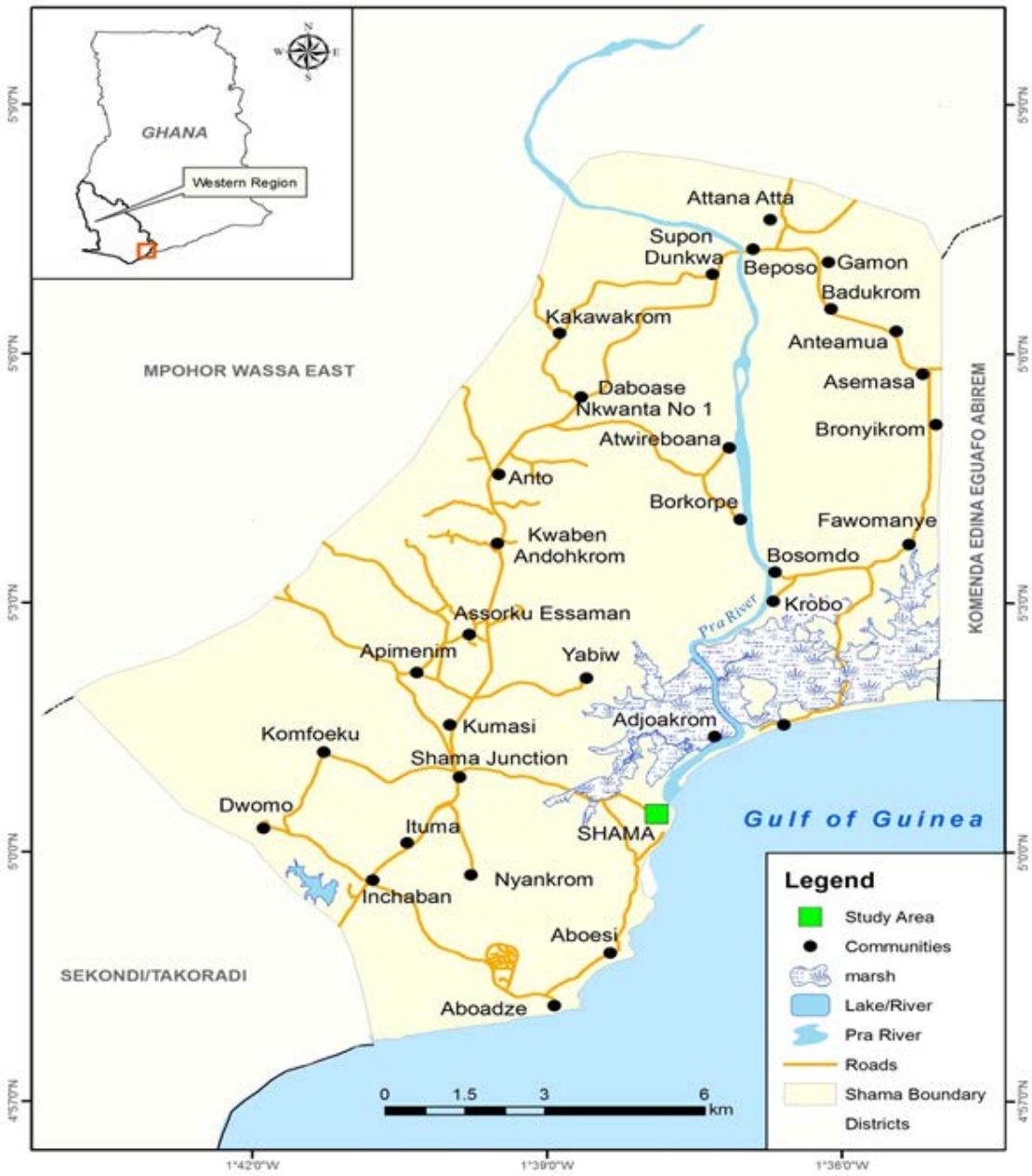
Since this study is qualitative in nature, it adopted the descriptive research design. Thiswas deemed appropriate given the problem that was investigated; sustainability of the fishing industry, and that the data generated for analysis would be largely qualitative. The study utilised interviews, focus group discussions and observation to generate data for analysis.

The population for the study comprised stakeholders in the artisanal fishing industry in Shama. A total of 33 respondents were selected through accidental and purposive sampling for interviewing. These included 9 canoe owners, 14 fishermen and 10 fish traders who were into fishing activities in two landing sites in the area.

A total of four focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, two in each landing beach site of the community. The groups were purposively selected, and comprised the chief fishermen (Apofohen) and queen of the fish traders (Konkohen) and their respective council of elders.

The number of participants in the focus group discussions ranged between six and eight. Members of these groups are themselves seasoned fishermen and fish traders, retired fishermen and fish traders or people who have made substantial investments in the artisanal fishing industry in the community.

A semi-structured interview guide and


GHANA
Western Region
MPOHOR WASSA EAST
KOMENDA EDINA EGUAFO ABIREM
SEKONDI/TAKORADI
Attana Atta
Supon Dunkwa
Beposo
Gamon
Badukrom
Kakawakrom
Anteamua
Asemasa
Daboase Nkwanta No 1
Bronyikrom
Atwireboana
Anto
Borkorpe
Fawomanye
Kwaben Andohkrom
Bosomdo
Krobo
Assorku Essaman
Pra River
Apimenim
Yabiw
Adjoakrom
Komfoeku
Kumasi
Shama Junction
Dwomo
Ituma
SHAMA
Gulf of Guinea
Nyankrom
Inchaban
Aboesi
Aboadze
Legend
Study Area
Communities
marsh
Lake/River
Pra River
Roads
Shama Boundary
Districts
0 1.5 3 6 km
1°42'0"W
1°39'0"W
1°36'0"W

FGDs were used to generate information on the organization of fishing in the area, challenges faced by the players in the fishing industry, and safety-net mechanisms deployed by the community to ensure the sustainability of livelihoods.

Beach activities observed include bargaining to set the daily price of fish to be sold and gifting of fish to fishermen who had not gone to sea. The data generated were analysed qualitatively using common themes identified and enriched with the responses from respondents.The analysis and findings were discussed in terms of the moral economy of traditional societies expressed in the literature.

Results and discussion

Organisation of fishing in Shama

The fishing activity is seen to be a physically demanding job and as such, few elderly men are allowed to join an expedition. Most elderly retired fishermen now own canoes or help with the mending of nets. The youth at a very tender age are initiated into fishing or trading in fish in an apprenticeship programme.

A normal fishing day for canoe owners and the crew began with the inspection of the nets, generators, outboard motors and canoes to ensure that these are all in proper working order. The crew also checked on their stock of fuel and food for the expedition and general readiness to go to sea.

A fishing crew numbered between eight and twenty depending on the size of the canoe. Fishing expeditions last betweena day and one week, the length of which depended on the season, type of fish sought, location of fish as well as other compelling circumstances. It was reported that whereas fishing in the estuary of the river Pra lasted a day, fishing for large fish such as tuna, ship jack and shark could last upward of three days.

Also, fishing expeditions in lean seasons lasted longer than the peak periods. The fishermen reported that they could use a day or two for an expedition in the peak period (usually between July and October) but that could not be said about the lean period. Some compelling situations could at times prolong their stay at sea.

References were made to high tides, storms, shortage of fuel and accidents at sea. Respondents stressed the positive role of folksongs in fishing and claimed that these were used to encourage them at sea and to prevent them from slacking on the job.

The fishermen went to sea all seasons and all year round, six days a week, from Wednesday to Monday and rested only on Tuesdays. The community had a belief and practice associated with the supernatural powers inherent in the sea. The sea goddess, they believed, has Tuesday as her rest day and for that matter should not be disturbed on that day, hence, going to sea on Tuesdays was seen as a taboo and dangerous.

Discussions revealed that some fishermen flouted this fishing regulation concerning fishing on Tuesdays and those who did so were prohibited from landing their catch on that day. Fish brought ashore is distributed in an order that ensured that firs,t outlays for fuel and equipment are covered; second, crew members are paid and the rest sold and kept as group savings to be used when the needarose.

Britwum (2009) in a study of three fishing communities in the Central Region, in addition

to the above, identifies social expectations and responsibilities of married and unmarried crew members when they receive payments in kind.

For the fish traders, their day began when the crew returned from an expedition. Depending on the time they arrived and the quantity of catch available, they would spend hours smoking the fish at home (which was usually close to the shore) or selling fresh or smoked fish to other customers.

Their equipment was usually basic; these included basins or pans of various sizes, wooden trays and the traditional smoking ovens. Others used other forms of preservation systems such as frying, salting, sun drying and storing in refrigerators locally known as cold stores. Women have access to fresh fish first as wives or relatives of men in the fishing industry, and second as owners of fishing gear, supplier of fuel or as fish processor.

The role of women here is significant as they add value to the fresh fish and ensure that it is available even in the lean season. It also allows the women to have some measure of control over fish prices by regulating the quantity released for sale in the market (Britwum, 1993).

Organizational structure of the artisana marine fishing industry

The organizational structure featured the chief fisherman (Apofohen) and his council of elders, queen of the fish traders (Konkohen) and her council of elders, canoe owners, canoe or boat captains and the general fishing populace. There was also a representative of the Fisheries Commission(government). For one to enter the fishing industry in the area, one had to seek permission from the chief fisherman while prospective fish traders sought permission from the queen of the fish traders.

The study found that among the fishermen and fish traders in Shama, the chief fisherman served as the highest authority in the adjudication of matters relating to fishing. He was the chief consultant between the fishermen, fish traders and the outside world. His duties were to see to the general welfare of everyone related to fishing, promoting the interest of the fishing community, resolving disputes, planning and execution of policy to better the lives of the people.He served as a representative on the council of the traditional ruler in the town and beyond. However, issues that could not be handled by the chief fisherman were referred to the traditional ruler of the community.

There was also the office of the queen (Konkohen) of the fish traders. The Konkohen and her council represent the interest of the women who traded and processed fish. In addition, they had the responsibility to set daily prices for fish caught in conjunction with the chief fisherman.

They also settled disputes arising between fish traders and fishermen and between fish traders. Also, they liaised between the canoe owners, fish mongers and market women who purchased processed fish for sale, within and outside the community. The council of elders were themselves experienced fish traders.

The Fisheries Department's representative was also part of the fishing industry's organisational structure as he or she representedthe state and the central government. The government representative, who is also a

technical officer, examined and determined the quantity and type of fish brought ashore and the means by which they were caught. He or she provided monthly reports to the regional office of the Fisheries Department in Takoradi.

Challenges of the artisanal marine fishing industry

Like many enterprises, the artisanal marine fishing industry in Shama is confronted with numerous challenges. The major problem respondents faced is the seasonal nature of the industry where there is the possibility of long periods of unemployment due to lean catches.

Apart from this, respondents also identified pair trawling, financial constraints, natural disasters, illegal and unacceptable fishing practices, competition and conflicts and high operational costs. These connived to make fishing a vulnerable activity. These challenges came up both in the individual interviews as well as in the focus group discussions which tended to force some fishing crew to migrate seasonally in search of better catches.

One major challenge identified by respondents and participants in the study bordered on the seasonal nature of their work and the attendant financial losses associated with it. The major fishing season lasts from July to October. During this period, fishermen were assured of bumper catches and could easily offset any operational costs and even save some money.

Respondents estimated that a fishing expedition costs about a thousand (1000) Ghana cedis to undertake and a good bumper catch would fetch notless than two thousand five hundred (2500) Ghana cedis. High running costs for fishing expeditions have also been identified in studies by Odotei (2002) and Vercruijsse (1983). In the lean season, however, most expeditions yielded little or sometimes no catch at all and this imposed heavy financial burdens on the crew and the financiers of the expeditions as confirmed by a 41-year old male canoe owner:

The main problem of seasonality is the debt we incur continuously. This normally leads to problems between us and the fish mongers. This is because sometimes fish traders pre-finance our expeditions with the expectation that they can sell the catch we bring. The main challenge here is that during the off seasons we most often return with very little catch or sometimes even with nothing at all and this means that they have made a bad investment. When this happens who bears the cost of the loss? And this is a source of dispute between the crew, canoe owners and fish traders. Usually, however, the debt is either split between the canoe owner and the fish trader or sometimes borne entirely by either of the parties involved

Second, respondents also complained about the issue of finance and claimed they had financial difficulties because of the inability to save, which had negative implications for subsequent expeditions. The responses indicated that insufficient financial capacity proved to be an overwhelming difficulty for all persons in the industry: the crew, canoe owners and fish traders alike.

This was because one needed a heavy capital investment to acquire a canoe, net, outboardmotor and other ancillary gear to successfully embark upon a fishing expedition and indeed work in the industry (see Or

chard and Abban 2011). The banks, however did not often lend money to the fishermen.

The interest rates charged by the banks, according to the respondents, were too prohibitive, and fishermen could not provide the usual collateral required for bank loans. Moreover, due to the seasonality and unpredictable nature of the industry, banks felt it was too risky granting them the credit facilities and many of the respondents admitted it was sometimes difficult to pay back the loans. These made borrowing from the banks difficult and unattractive to the players in the fishing industry. The following quote emphasizes this problem:

As fish traders, one major challenge we are faced with is financial inadequacies. Most of us do not have enough money (financial capital), so we buy on credit. The bank also refuses to offer us loans due to lack of collaterals. With these, anytime a canoe owner demands an upfront payment for the catch, most of us are unable to buy it. We also have the difficulty in replacing our obsolete equipment (A 45 year old female FGD participant)

Added to the above difficulty is the cost associated with regular servicing of generators and outboard motors and the high cost of pre-mix fuel. The seasonal nature of the catch made it difficult for some fishermen to fall back on savings during the lean season or to seek loans from the banks.

Some women have stepped in when the need arose to provide money not only for fuel for the fishing expedition, but also for the acquisition of canoes, outboard motors and other fishing gear. According to Britwum (2009), this role played by women as fuel providers and owners of fishing equipment has moved them to the highest positions on the production chain and makes the roles of both fishermen and fish traders inter-dependent.

Third, another challenge faced by the Shama fishing community was the activities of foreign fishing trawlers. These, respondents claimed, overfished the waters leaving them with very little to harvest. They indicated that this was compounded by bad weather which caused the foreign vessels to destroy their nets and canoes by collision.

Our catch has reduced substantially with the presence of these foreign fishing trawlers and as if that is not enough, they bully us at sea by destroying our gear.
(Male FGD participant)

Fourth, respondents and participants also identified the challenge of illegal fishing practices of some of their colleagues; practices adopted in response to their dwindling fortunes in fish catches posed by pair trawling and seasonality. They indicated that some of them used unapproved nets, light, dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) and dynamite in fishing, practices banned by government.

These practices have acted as a two edged sword, yielding improved catches for fishermen who engage in them but killing fish indiscriminately and destroying their breeding grounds. In the long term, the quality and quantity of fish caught has reduced posing serious threats to the livelihoods of fishing households. (See EJF, 2012). The following words by two respondents substantiate the point in question:

Indeed some of us, the recalcitrant ones among us, use light, dynamite and in some-cases poison to catch fish. The issue is that the catch over the past few years has dwindled so

much so that many people have gotten desperate hence the use of all these crude methods (a 48 year old crew member)

Light fishing is really a problem. Due to activities of these light fishers, we find it difficult to get fish near the shore. We have to travel far in order to get a catch. This has contributed to the increasing cost of fishing operations of those of us who do not use light to fish.
(Male FGD participant)

Fifth, respondents also indicated that high tides, fogs and storms hampered the work of the crew members at sea. Fogs posed a problem of poor visibility to both night as well as daytime fishing expeditions. High tides and thunder storms were threats to canoes, nets and sometimes to human lives as well. These naturally occurring challenges have also been confirmed by the Bank of Ghana (Bank of Ghana, 2008) and Ostrom (2002).

Fog has been one of the major problems we face. During such encounters we cannot see our way clearly and the tides can also change our course which often makes us lose our way and land at other beaches sometimes outside Ghana
(Interview: a 25 year old male crew member)

We usually encounter strange storms or things that appear to be supernatural. For instance, just last Saturday, we met a very strange weather in the day time and this made it impossible for us to see one another.
(Interview: a 30 year old crew member)

Sixth, another area of concern the fishermen and the fish mongers reported was competition and conflict. Conflict was identified at three levels. First, respondents claimed that conflict usually ensued between two groups of fishermen at sea over which crew spotted a shoal of fish first and therefore had the right to cast its net at a particular location. Conflict between local fishermen at sea sometimes degenerated into an open fight with casualties occurring.

The chief fisherman usually became the arbiter to settle the matter when the fishermen arrive on shore. Competition and conflict between fishermen have also been reported by the FAO (2008). The second was between fishermen and crew of foreign trawlers over damage to canoe and gear caused by the trawlers.

The respondents claimed that these foreign trawlers trespass and fish in the shallow waters where artisanal marine fishing occurs and the foreign trawlers sometimes destroy their fishing gear when the weather is bad and visibility is poor. The third source of conflict arose out of the interdependent relationship between fishermen and fish traders regarding the latter's role in fuelling fishing expeditions and ownership of fishing gear.

It was explained that the role played by the fish traders in supporting fishermen with financial help was done in anticipation that they (fish traders) would be the first tobe served when the catch was brought to shore. Unfortunately, sometimes this did not happen especially when fishermen did not get sufficient catches and when they were in dire need of money to meet other commitments.

Ensuring sustainability:
redistribution and reciprocity

The major problem identified by respondents in the artisanal marine fishing industry then was the issue of unsustainability of their livelihoods resulting from overfishing,

financial constraints and inappropriate fishing practices. In spite of this, respondents indicated both in the interviews and focus-group discussions that fishing is a way of life in their community, a profession that has been handed down generations and so cannot be abandoned. Respondents enumerated ways in which the fishing industry has been sustained in spite of the seasonal nature and attendant challenges. These are discussed in the next few paragraphs.

One way of addressing the financial problem faced by respondents was either by borrowing or falling on group savings. The data indicated that whereas only a few canoe owners and fish traders borrowed from the bank to support their businesses, respondents indicated that fishermen generally relied on group savings stashed away during bumper harvests or on networks of reciprocity and support within the community to deal with the problem of seasonality and the consequences of overfishing. On group savings, a respondent revealed the following:

We sometimes save money for the whole group during the bumper season. On the days we have no catch or on days we mend our nets, we go for the money and share.

Different stakeholders also borrowed money from one another. Crew members borrowed from the canoe owners and the fish mongers while the canoe owners also borrowed from the fish mongers. There appeared to be a relationship of trust between fish traders and fishermen such that fish traders could loan out monies to the fishermen in the hope that the fishermen would hand over their catch to them to sell.

In another breadth, fish traders could be given fish to sell even if they do not have money to pay up after the fish is sold. The above findings are corroborated by Britwum (2009), Overa (2000) and Ansa Koi (2008) in which resources for the fishing business are mobilized through the extended family.

Ansa Koi's (2008) study of the fishing industry at Moree, a coastal community near Cape Coast, further reveals that it was the moral obligation of individuals in the fishing community to share whatever resources they have with each other. Such resources could be money, fishing gear, food and labour for fishing and other fishing related activities.

She reported that safety-net mechanisms which included the extended family and other social networks were used in the fishing community of Moree to support the poor in periods of economic hardship. Immediate and extended kin can provide a social safety-net by meeting material and financial needs during difficult times as well as providing inexpensive labour.

Britwum (2009), Ansa Koi (2008) and Overa (2000) also confirm that fishermen operate in avulnerability context in terms of access to resources, perennial low catch due to dwindling fish stock and seasonality and high risk factors that they almost always have to depend on their social relations for a buffer.

The reliance on the family also corroborates with Moser's (1998) argument that during economic downturn, households act as critical safety nets, before outside assistance is provided. As short term- shock absorbers, fishermen and fish mongers support individuals who have assets and these help reduce the vulnerability. It is clear from the data that these modes of dealing with shocks and trends are just for coping with temporary

situations which are referred to as survival strategies. However, the reasons for the borrowing by the crew members often differed among the respondents.

As the crew borrowed for consumption, the canoe owners and the fish mongers did so mostly for investment. But it was the moral obligation that the canoe owners assisted the crew members, especially during the lean season. They also depended on the fish traders who were the buyers of their catch for soft loans. It was understood as the duty of the canoe owners and the fish traders to help crew members because they worked for the canoe owners and the fish traders bought the catch and sold for profit. Another element within the moral economy of the Shama fishing community was that of fish giving as gifts.

The gifting of fish is a common practice among fishermen and fish traders in the study community. An observation of beach practice showed that it was usual for people to request for fish from colleague fishermen or fish traders when one did not go to sea. It was a clear moral obligation to support one another. According to one respondent:

Fishermen who do not get a good catch sometimes ask others who might have a bounty catch for some fish to support their families. Most often, these requests are never refused. It is a practice that we help one another with cash or fish to support our families.
According to another:

During the lean seasons and other difficult times, I depend on my friends and brothers who do deep sea fishing for help. I sit at the beach so that upon their arrival, I can go to them for fish for food or sell to buy foodstuff.
(a 45 year old canoe owner)

Fishermen with vulnerable livelihoods then can still support themselves and their families until such time that conditions improve and they can resume fishing. This practice of gifting fish is done in the expectation that recipient fishermen would reciprocate the gesture at an appropriate time.

The art of gifting has been identified in the literature on moral economy in African communities, generally where reciprocal exchanges occur during funerals, weddings, and naming ceremonies and so on (see Sugimura, 2007). Such gifting is seen as a way to redistribute wealth within communities from those who have in excess to those who do not.

The above methods of coping with risks in the artisanal marine fishing industry in Shama are appropriately identified as ex-post strategies in the literature. In the context of sustainability of fishing livelihoods, the moral economy operates to offer social capital on which community members draw to sustain their livelihoods in the face of diminishing returns to fish catches, hence social relations of reciprocity and redistribution of assets play an important role in the livelihoods of the fishing community of Shama.

Conclusion

The artisanal marine fishing industry in Shama is highly organised and involves a great number of participants and households who depend on this industry for a livelihood. In spite of the role of the fishing industry in the livelihoods of community members and the nation at large, the industry is not without challenges.

These challenges have include seasonality of the industry and associated financial costs,

competition from foreign fishing trawlers, high operational costs, financial constraints, illegal and unacceptable fishing practices and natural disasters. These challenges have made fishing an unsustainable livelihood activity in Shama. In spite of this, the community's social organization is based on a moral economy of networks of support based on reciprocity and redistribution on which stakeholders in the artisanal marine fishing industry draw (family, social networks and social claims) to ensure the sustainability of their livelihoods. It is through such networks and claims that they are able to access financial capital to support their fishing businesses and expeditions as well as ensure livelihoods even in the face of vulnerabilities. It is, however, clear that with a dwindling livelihood base and increasing economic hardships, the operations of the moral economy in the long run will fail. The fishing community will need some support from both state and civil society organisations to assist the present coping strategies and encourage the use of ex-ant risk management adaptive strategies that would encourage diversification of livelihood activities.

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