

Fish Markets in Sierra Leone: Size, Structure, Distribution Networks and Opportunities for Aquaculture Development

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Abstract : Efforts by the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and its development partners to introduce “modern” aquaculture in Sierra Leone since the 1970s have not been successful. A number of reasons have been hypothesized, including the suggestion that the market infrastructure and demand for farmed fish were inadequate to stimulate large-scale and widespread aquaculture production in the country. We have assessed the size, structure, networks, and opportunities in fish markets using a combination of Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) and questionnaire surveys conducted in a sample of 29 markets (urban, weekly, wholesale, and retail) and two hundred traders. The study showed that the local fish markets were dynamic, with very high variations in demand and supply. The markets sampled supplied between 135.2 and 9947.6 tonnes/year. Mean prices for fresh fish varied between US\$1.12 and US\$3.89/kg depending on species, with smoked catfish and shrimps commanding prices as high as US\$7.4/kg. It is unlikely that marine capture fisheries can increase their current production levels, and these may, in fact, already be over-exploited and declining. Marine fish supplies are particularly low between July and September. More careful attention to the timing of harvests (rainy season, not dry season) and to species (catfish, not tilapia) (could help in the successful adoption of aquaculture.

Keywords : fisheries, aquaculture, marine, fish ponds

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