

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Fishing is an important human activity which has for a long time attracted and supported human settlement. Fish is not only important because of its economic and nutritional value, but also that in historical times fisheries played important roles in shaping the destinies of societies. The number of fishermen exploiting the Zambian fisheries has grown rapidly from colonial times because many men and women have been searching for a livelihood. The rapid increase in people taking up fishing as a source of their livelihood has exerted a lot of pressure on the industry leading to the depletion of fish stocks in the Zambian rivers and lakes.

Fishing has been a major source of livelihood for the people of Samfya District since their settlement in the area. Like other human activities, fishing techniques have witnessed tremendous transformation from traditional nets, baskets, weirs, traps and canoes to modern fishing nets such as seine and trawler nets and motorised plank and fibre glass boats. The indigenous people of Samfya District have benefited immensely from the local fish industry in terms of food security and wealth accumulation. The importance of the fishing industry in Zambia stimulated both the colonial and post colonial governments' interventions aimed at ensuring that the fishing communities derive optimum benefits from the fish resources and at the same time ensure future supplies of fish. Colonial intervention was first ignited by the sudden disappearance of the **Labeo altivelis** species (Mpumbu) commonly known as 'Luapula Salmon' in

Lake Mweru in 1937 which the local African fishermen blamed on the large number of European commercial fishermen.¹

In 1943, the government through the Department of Fisheries assumed control and management of the Lake Fisheries in Northern Rhodesia in order to prevent over-exploitation of the fisheries through non-selective fishing instruments.² From July that year, net licences throughout the Bangweulu area, Chambeshi and the Luapula Rivers were instituted. Local fishermen were restricted to fish in designated tribal areas and those who trespassed in the fishing grounds of other ethnic groups were punished by paying higher licence fees.³

The government also instituted measures on the mesh of the nets. No mesh was supposed to be less than three inches between two opposite corners drawn tight.⁴ Seine nets attracted higher licence fees which were charged according to the size of the mesh and rising very high for the Europeans as a way of giving due advantage to the African fishermen. The use of trawler nets and **Tephrosia** (Ububa) to poison fish were forbidden due to their non selectiveness in the size of the fish caught. The same regulation required weirs and fish baskets to have gaps in order to allow small fishes to escape. Interestingly, though these measures received maximum support from Native Authorities in Samfya District, they were opposed by the fishermen because they did not understand government intentions.⁵

Opposition by the fishermen was due to the colonial authorities' failure to sensitise the local people on the long term benefits of the impending measures and especially bearing in mind that the local people depended on fishing for

their livelihood and regarded the fisheries as their communal property. Furthermore, the majority of fishermen believed that fish resources were inexhaustible and that whatever they did would not deplete the fish resources. However this argument could have held true among the local fishermen up to the 1960s when fishing methods involved the use of spears, fishing baskets, fish traps and a handful of fishing nets which were selective in the type of fish caught. As the population of people who sought a livelihood on fishing and fish trading increased, a more advanced fishing techniques and gear were employed in order to maximize the catch per person, especially after independence.

In Mweru-Luapula, Musambachime explained that by 1952 Kashikishi was transformed into a large fishing village because of its proximity to the breeding grounds of the bream.⁶ That was followed, three years later, by Kashikishi being chosen, by the colonial government, as a site for the ice plant, to supply ice cubes to the growing number of fresh fish traders from the Copperbelt province. That innovation led to an increase in the population of Kashikishi which by 1957 stood at 3,000 people and changed its status from a fishing village to a township. In the same year Kashikishi was given £18,600 for capital projects aimed at promoting the fishing industry.⁷ Furthermore, the Lunda Native Authorities built Rest Houses for Europeans and African traders coming into the area. These developments in Kashikishi connected the area to the colonial capitalist economy whose benefits the people harnessed to the fullest.

In Samfya District, colonial government intervention in the fish industry also led to Mwamfuli village becoming a centre of the Bangweulu fish trade. The area was slowly transformed into a large fishing village and fish marketing centre as

fish from the Bangweulu, Chishi, Mbabala and Chilubi Islands was taken there, awaiting transportation to the Copperbelt markets.⁸ Fish trade at Mwamfuli was further boosted in 1950 by the introduction of a regular bus service, by Luka Mumba, which plied three times to and from the Copperbelt. The bus service played two decisive roles in the development of Mwamfuli village. Firstly, it linked Samfya District and Mwamfuli village in particular, to the lucrative colonial capitalist economy of the Copperbelt. Secondly, that route cut down the length of the journey which fishermen took to transport bundles of fish by canoe to Samfya from where it was then loaded on bicycles to Kapalala. At Kapalala fish was transported on trucks to the Copperbelt. By 1956 Mwamfuli village had become a fully fledged market centre for the Bangweulu fish trade.⁹

In the southern part of Samfya, another fish market developed at Katanshya to serve the fishermen of lakes Chali, Kang'wena, Kampolombo, in Kapata peninsular, and from Mpanta point. Though Katanshya could not develop into a large fishing village like Mwamfuli, it later grew in leaps and bounds, as a fish market because of its proximity to lakes Chali, Kang'wena, Kampolombo and Mpanta point. In order to create a water link between Lake Bangweulu and the southern lakes of Kampolombo, Kang'wena and Chali, the Kampolombo canal was constructed and opened in February 1960, by Senior Chief Kalasa Mukoso. The canal increased fishing activities in lakes Chali, Kang'wena, Kampolombo and Mpanta point and boosted fish trading activities at Katanshya market.¹⁰

After independence in 1964, Katanshya market recorded increased fish trading activities due to increased number of fishermen in lakes Chali, Kang'wena, Kampolombo and the Luapula River. In 1969, for instance, Katanshya recorded

increased fish sales of 5,195.656 lbs fresh weight of dried fish which rose to 5,942.776 lbs in 1970. During the same period, Mwamfuli market recorded only 343,392 lbs and 134,072 lbs fresh weight of dried fish respectively.¹¹

The post-colonial Zambian government continued to promote the welfare of fishermen in the country through material and financial support. In the First National Development Plan (FNDP) of 1966-1970, the Credit Organisation of Zambia (COZ) which was set up in 1964, was strengthened and gave out K43,000 in loans to fishermen throughout the country and supplied subsidised fishing nets from the outlets of the state controlled Nkwazi net manufacturer.¹² During the same period (1966-1970) the government made deliberate efforts to encourage fishermen to form Cooperative Societies to look after their operational facilities such as nets and boats. Ultimately this led to the formation of the African Fishers Marketers Union (AFMU), which later incorporated several fishing and trading associations.

In 1967 the Zambian government fixed and gazetted a new Fish Price Ordinance with a view to help fishermen get better value for their catch. Following the 1968 Mulungushi economic reforms, the Zambian government purchased majority shares of the Zambian subsidiary of the South African fish distributors, Irwin and Johnson, and set up the Lake Fishers of Zambia as the agent responsible for the purchase and distribution of fish within Zambia.¹³

However, the development of Mwamfuli Village and Katanshya as fish marketing centres could not be sustained by the post independent government because fishermen found it more profitable to sell fish at the lake, where they would not pay fish levies, than bringing it to the market. Eventually both

Mwamfuli Village and Katanshya market lost their importance as fish marketing centres because fish traders followed the fishermen in their fishing camps, where fish was cheap and traders did spend as much time as they used to at Mwamfuli and Katanshya markets.

Despite the efforts of the colonial and post colonial governments to promote the fishing industry of Luapula province and the huge quantities of fish caught and sold, most fishermen of Samfya District have remained poor. This contradiction is what I examine in this dissertation. Samfya District should have been a thriving and rich town, and its inhabitants should have benefited immensely from the lucrative fish trade, especially in an environment where the traditional custodians of the fishing grounds gave the local fishermen access to fish, in exchange for an annual tribute. The freedom to fish in any fishing ground, gave the fishermen of Samfya District abundant fish resources whose benefits some fishermen did not adequately harness. In this study I have examined the lifestyle and causes of poverty among some fishermen of Samfya District in the midst of abundant fish resources. The study has also examined the effects of government policies on the fish industry of Samfya District.

1.1 Rationale

While most previous studies have investigated the benefits and importance of the fishing industry in the Luapula province of Zambia, this study investigates the causes of poverty among some fishermen of Samfya District in the midst of abundant fish resources. Besides contributing to the socio-economic history of Zambia, it is hoped its findings will provoke further research on the fishing industry in Zambia.

1.2 Area of study

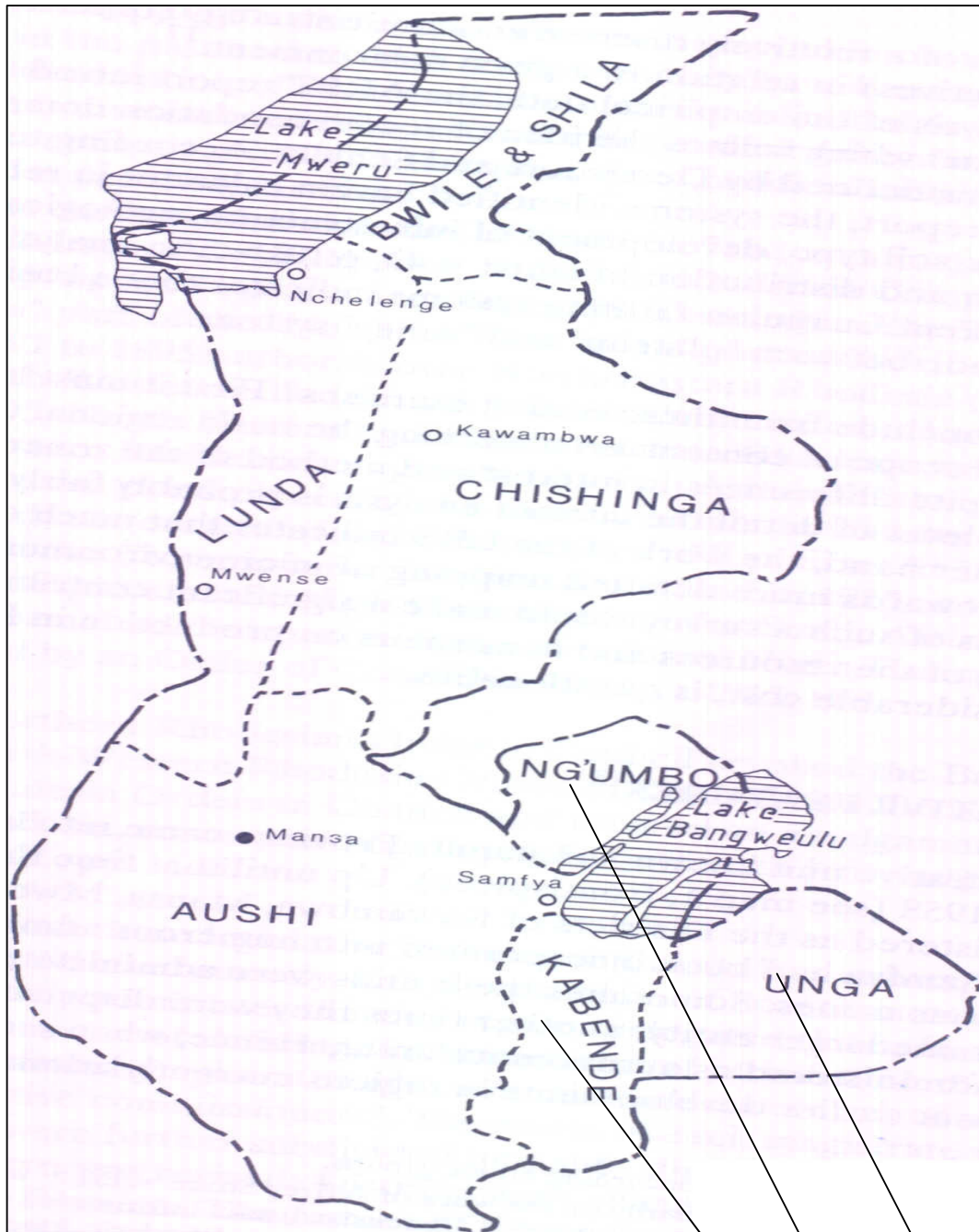


Table1: MAP OF LUAPULA PROVINCE SHOWING THE LOCATION OF SAMFYA DISTRICT. SOURCE: Jeremy Gould: Luapula: Dependence or Development?

Samfya District catchment area

(Vammala: Vammalan Kirjapaino oy, Finland, 1989), P.49

As shown on the map on the previous page, the area of study is Samfya District, located in the southwestern portion of northern Zambia in Luapula province. Samfya became a district in 1959, taking over the areas of Fort Rosebery and Luwingu districts bordering Lake Bangweulu. Before that, the area was part of Northern Province until 1958 when Luapula was established as a province, and comprised only Fort Rosebery and Kawambwa districts.¹⁴

Most of Samfya District is covered by Lake Bangweulu, Chali, Kang'wena and Kampolombo and also lagoons, swamps and dambos. The Bangweulu is Zambia's largest lake. It covers an area of 3,000 km² of permanent water surface but expands to 15,000 km², during the rainy season, when it combines with wetlands and floodplains.¹⁵ To the South of the lake lies a massive expanse of swamps known as the Bangweulu swamps, where the Unga people live. Samfya District is inhabited by three main ethnic groups namely; the Ng'umbo, who are the largest, to the north and north-west, the Kabende to the south and the Unga to the east of Lake Bangweulu. Within the Bangweulu swamps are found the remnants of the Batwa ethnic group who are the original inhabitants of the whole district.¹⁶

It is important at this point to define poverty in the context of the topic under study.

1.3 Defining Poverty

It is difficult to come up with a universally acceptable definition of poverty because the term is perceived differently by various communities and societies. Poverty also depends on the level of development a given society has attained. O'Connor defined poverty in association with low levels of income, in terms of

cash or subsistence production and therefore low levels of consumption of goods and services.¹⁷ The World Bank defined poverty in absolute and relative terms. According to the World Bank, absolute poverty referred to a set of standards which were consistent over time and between countries. For instance, all people living on less than \$1.25 per day were considered poor.¹⁸ Relative poverty on the other hand, is a socially defined phenomenon and is dependent on the social context as a measure of income inequality. Thus, relative poverty is a condition of having fewer resources or income than others.

Paul-Mark Henry treats poverty as a severe lack of material and cultural goods which impedes the normal development of individuals to the point of compromising their personal integrity. According to Henry, a person in want was someone who was found in such a degrading and consuming struggle with life and lived in a permanent state of isolation and insecurity. Such an individual had no guarantee of meeting fundamental cost of living as a human being.¹⁹

John Iliffe defined poverty in terms of physical want, which included lack of food, shelter and clothes.²⁰ He looked at poverty to be structural and conjunctural. Structural poverty was a long term poverty of individuals due to their personal and social circumstances while conjunctural poverty was a temporary situation into which people may be thrown by crises such as drought, floods or fish ban.

However, many respondents in Samfya District also had their own description of poverty in their local language as **insala, icipowe, ubucushi or ubupina**.

According to them any person who owned less than ten fishing nets was considered to be a poor fisherman.²¹

Poverty is relative and manifests itself in various forms according to the level of economic development a given society has attained. Baldwin defined poverty in terms of income and considered people to be poverty stricken when their income fell behind that of a larger community.²² In this regard Baldwin argued that poverty was relative in that it was concerned with standards within a contemporary social environment and depended on value judgment. With regard to the fishing communities, poverty was an individual's inability to own the required number of productive fishing equipment such as nets and boats. This study applied Baldwin's definition of poverty to discuss the extent to which poverty manifested itself among some fishermen of Samfya District.

The causes of poverty among some fishermen were multifaceted and are rooted in the social and cultural domains of the fishing societies. Some of the causes of poverty were internal factors related to those which were associated among the fishermen themselves while the external factors were those to which fishermen had no direct control.

In fishing like any other industry, fishermen were classified into various categories of status of rich, middle or poor depending on capital accumulation and fishing equipment one owned. In Samfya District three groups of fishermen were easily distinguished based on ownership of the means of production.²³ In the first group were successful rich fishermen who owned fibre glass or plank engine powered boats with more than 20 nets. Those were regarded as wealthy men who usually hired or employed some helpers to do the fishing and

supervised the sale of the catch. Such fishermen occupied a distinguished social status among the fishing villages and commanded a lot of influence in determining fish prices. The second group comprised middle class fishermen who were neither rich nor poor. These were fishermen who did not own adequate fishing gear to stand on their own, but combined their productive assets in partnerships of two or more. They could neither hire nor employ helpers, so they did the fishing and sold the catch for themselves. The last group comprised poor fishermen who owned nothing except for their labour which they offered to the rich fishermen. The reward for the poor fishermen was determined by the employer on account of how much fish they caught.

1.4 Literature Review

In his study of the fish industry of Kashikishi, Mwelwa Musambachime explained the important contribution of the fish industry to the social and economic status of not only the people but also the development of Kashikishi as a major fishing area after 1952.²⁴ Though Musambachime's study did not show who were the major beneficiaries between the fishermen and fish traders, the study was used, in this study, to determine the factors which favoured the development of Kashikishi into a more viable fishing industry than the fishing industry of Samfya District.

According to David Gordon, fish conservation measures by the Northern Rhodesia government started in 1937 due to the sudden disappearance of the **Labeo Altivelis** (Mpumbu) species in Lake Mweru which the local fishermen blamed on the increased number of expatriate fishermen of Greek and Belgian

origin.²⁵ Among African, Greek and Belgian fishermen being the major players, Gordon did not indicate who the conservation measures benefitted the most.

Friday Njaya's study in Malawi revealed how in 1946, the colonial government curbed the indiscriminate use of non-selective fishing methods by the local people through the control of the fisheries to ensure sustainability in fish resource utilisation.²⁶ Although the measures were meant to safeguard the fishing interests of the local people, the study did not show the extent to which the colonial fish conservation measures benefitted the local fishermen.

W. V. Brelsford argued how from 1943 the government assumed control and management of the lake fisheries in order to prevent over exploitation of the fisheries resources through non-selective fishing methods and instruments.²⁷ Local fishermen in the Bangweulu fishery and its surrounding areas were subjected to various fishing restrictions whose effects, both on the fishery and the local fishermen, Brelsford's study did not bring out.

The Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources reported the increase in fish production in the country from 12,518 tonnes in 1952 to 33,866 tonnes in 1964 and that the Bangweulu fishery had a total of 7 000 fishermen.²⁸ That report showed the importance of fish to the people of Samfya District which this study also investigated.

D.W. Evans's study argued that lake Bangweulu and its adjoining basins and swamps had long been a major supplier of fish for the local towns and the northern industrial cities of the Copperbelt.²⁹ However the study did not show why most fishermen were still poor despite their long history in catching fish.

In Malawi, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) report argued that, fishing in Lake Malombe and the south-east arm of Lake Malawi, was an occupation that was combined with agriculture.³⁰ But due to increased economic demand on fish, the industry gradually assumed an overwhelming economic importance that saw its transformation into a competitive rural industry. However the report lacked details of whether or not fishermen benefitted from the opportunities offered by the lucrative urban markets.

Commenting on the profitability of fishing in Lake Malombe, M. Mdaihli and S. Donda in their report revealed how the total economic output of the upper Shire river declined in the 1980s due to the collapse of the Chambo fish stocks.³¹ The report further stated that except for the fishermen of Lake Malombe, fishermen on the upper Shire river and south-east arm of Lake Malawi operated on a low or no profit at all. Mdaihli and Donda's report failed to identify the major impediments why fishermen of upper Shire and south –east arm of Lake Malawi made no profit.

The joint Malawi - German Fisheries Project revealed how the increase in the number of fishermen in Malawi led to the decline of fish catches per fisherman and how consequently it affected the livelihood and health status of the people.³² The report revealed a similar situation which this study observed in Samfya District.

In Zimbabwe, Nyikahadzai observed that both the colonial and post colonial governments intervened in the fishing industry through various legislations aimed at helping fishermen accrue optimum benefits from the fish resources

while ensuring sustainability of future supplies of fish.³³ Nyikahadzai argued that colonial intervention was on assumption that the fishermen were only interested in satisfying their present needs with little or no concern for the future of the fisheries. However, the study did not appreciate the resilience of the local traditional fishing methods and failed to show the extent to which the traditional fishing methods were destructive.

J.O. Manyala studied the social and cultural features and impact of small scale fishery on the lower Sondu-Miriu River in Kenya. Manyala concluded that where only the local people fished in the river; there was no evidence of fish stock depletion.³⁴ J.O.Manyala's study was also the case of the local fishermen of the Bangweulu fishery whose traditional fishing methods was not a threat to the depletion of fish stocks which this study discovered.

The NINA-NIKU project report carried out in the Okavango River in Namibia revealed the importance of subsistence fishery in supporting the growing number of human population which had been subsisting on fish resources.³⁵ The report revealed how in the Okavango River 53 percent of the people caught fish and 91 percent subsisted on fish for their livelihood. That report revealed an important aspect of how most people along the Okavango River depended on fish as their only source of livelihood which was also peculiar to the people of Samfya District.

Reynolds' study vividly pointed out how fish permeated the lifestyle of the people of the Gwembe valley in Southern province.³⁶ The study explained how people possessed vast knowledge of fish, where each fish was known by its name and every child in the community was initiated along the same lines.

Knowledge of fish underpinned the importance of fishing among the riverine communities, which is also peculiar to the people of Samfya District.

B. Sanyanga and J.M. Lupikisha's project report appreciated the economic importance of fishing in mitigating the impact of poor crop yields and food insecurity in areas such as Gwembe, Siavonga and Sinazongwe where agricultural activities were widespread.³⁷ Reynolds' study and Sanyanga and Lupikisha's report appreciated the important contribution of the fish industry to the economy of the people in the Gwembe valley.

Weza Chabwela's study explained how the Northern Rhodesia government maintained strict control of fisheries through various statutory instruments which did not allow overfishing and how after independence, the Zambian government decontrolled the fisheries to please its own people.³⁸ Though most of the population in Samfya District depended on fisheries resources for employment as fishermen, fish traders and middlemen, the study called for the need to exercise control of the fisheries resources to ensure profitability and sustainability of the industry. Since fishing in Northern Rhodesia was done by both Europeans and Africans, Chabwela's study did not indicate which group was overfishing and how the local fishermen benefitted from the Northern Rhodesia government fish conservation measures. However, it should be appreciated that rural communities in Zambia and Africa as a whole had limited options for survival and were thus compelled to exploit those resources below the level of resilience.³⁹

The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Fisheries Project revealed how in Lake Kariba, the local fishermen welcomed the idea of

regrouping them into permanent fishing settlements. However the same fishermen resisted the idea of removing them away from the main fish breeding grounds.⁴⁰ The report showed how the Tonga fishermen were suspicious of any attempt to deprive them of their fishing grounds, which case this study identified among the fishermen of Samfya District. Patrick Chipungu and Hasan Moinuddin as well as the SADC Fisheries Project revealed how the Tonga fishermen categorically rejected being regrouped in fishing villages away from the fish breeding areas which had been designated for seasonal closure.⁴¹

J.E. Reynolds and H. Molsa' s study noted how fishing in Zambia was the third most important occupation after farming and mining, as many Zambians were involved in fisheries related employment.⁴² The study emphasised the importance of fishing which this study also observed among the people of Samfya District.

H. Van der Aalst's study in Mweru-Luapula, observed how lack of credit facilities for fishermen to purchase suitable fishing gear compelled them to use fishing equipment that were either illegal or perceived to be non selective.⁴³ Aalst's revelation was not peculiar to the Mweru-Luapula fishery but also to the Bangweulu fishery which this study investigated.

Studies in the Zambezi Basin by the World Fish Centre echoed the valuable contribution of the fisheries in the provision of not only high quality nutrition for the people of the area, but also sustenance of a diversity of livelihood strategies ranging from those who caught the fish to those who processed and traded the catch.⁴⁴ In Samfya District also, fish has played a major role in fostering unity among the various communities of that area, which this study has investigated.

The Ninth Technical Consultation Meeting on Fisheries and Wildlife called for regional training of fishermen in fish conservation, processing and marketing so that they could benefit fully from the fish resources of the region.⁴⁵ Lack of training among the fishermen on fish conservation and preservation has been identified by this study as an obstacle to the prosperity of some Bangweulu fishermen.

James Siwo Mbuga studied the socioeconomic aspects of the Tilapia, Nile Perch and Pelagic fisheries in Lake Victoria. The study observed how the increased demand on fishing by people searching for a livelihood endangered the sustainability of the fishery.⁴⁶ Mbuga's study identified the increase in population as a reason for the decline in fish catches per fisherman as opposed to over fishing and use of bad fishing methods which only existed on a small scale.

J. Kolding, H.Ticheler and B. Chanda studied the fishing methods and gear in the Bangweulu swamps and concluded that since Bangweulu was a multi-species fishery different meshed nets and fishing methods should be used in order to harvest different fish species.⁴⁷ This study has established that using one category of nets in a multi-species fishery exerted pressure on certain species of fish at the expense of other species.

1.5 Methodology

The first part of this research was conducted in the University of Zambia library. It involved consulting primary and secondary sources using published and unpublished articles, especially from the Special Collections Section. I used M.A. dissertations, PhD theses, books, articles, and research papers which

provided relevant information and theories on the topic the study was investigating.

The second part of this research was devoted to collecting data from primary sources and other published documents in the National Archives of Zambia (NAZ). Provincial Annual Reports, Annual reports on Native Affairs, Samfya District Notebook, District Commissioners' Conferences and Tour Reports yielded a lot of information on colonial and post colonial governments' policies on the fish industry.

The third part of this research involved the use of records at the Department of Fisheries in Chilanga, for information on the fish industry and government policies on the fish industry in Zambia. The Central Statistical Office (CSO) publications in Lusaka provided me with annual fish statistics for Samfya District.

The last part of my research was field research in Samfya District. I visited Luapula Provincial Fisheries Offices for information on annual fish production per fishery in Luapula province. In Samfya, I interviewed fishermen, fish traders some members of the general public on the lifestyle of fishermen. I used structured and open-ended interviews to collect primary information.

Organisation of the Study

This dissertation comprises five chapters. Chapter One deals with the introduction and historical background. Chapter Two focuses on the importance of the fishing industry to the people of Samfya District and how it influenced their social and economic life. Chapter Three deals with the causes of poverty

among some fishermen of Samfya District from 1935 to 1970 when there were abundant fish resources in the Bangweulu fishery. Chapter Four discusses the colonial and post colonial government policies on the fishing industry and their effects on the fishermen of Samfya District. The Conclusion follows Chapter four.

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CHAPTER TWO

2.0 SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF SAMFYA DISTRICT

2.1 Introduction

The people of Samfya District lived a communal type of life which was similar in all communities. That was so because their socio-economic life was to a large extent dependent on the fishing industry which had over the years shaped their lifestyle. In this chapter I have discussed the lifestyle of the people of Samfya District and how their lives were influenced by the fishing industry. I have also discussed some elements of social differentiation among the fishermen in the district and how fish has worked as a catalyst in fostering unity among the different communities in the district.

2.2 The People of Samfya District.

The people of Samfya District are part of the general wave of Luba - Lunda migrations that swept across Zambia from the Congo in the late 1500s and the early 1800s. The largest ethnic group is the Ng'umbo under chiefs Mibenge Chitembo, Mwewa, Mwansakombe, Mbulu, Mulongwe and Kasoma Bangweulu among others. The other ethnic group is the Kabende under chiefdoms Kalasa Mukoso and Mulakwa. The Unga who live a complete fishing life are found in the chiefdoms of Bwalya Mponda, Nsombo, Kalimankonde, Nsamba, Kasoma Lunga and Mweshi.¹ Within the Unga ethnic group however, are a number of Batwa who are the original inhabitants of the Bangweulu swamps. There is another group of Batwa on Kansenga sand bank in Chief Mulakwa's area in

Kapata peninsular.² The following map shows the location of major chieftaincies in Samfya District.

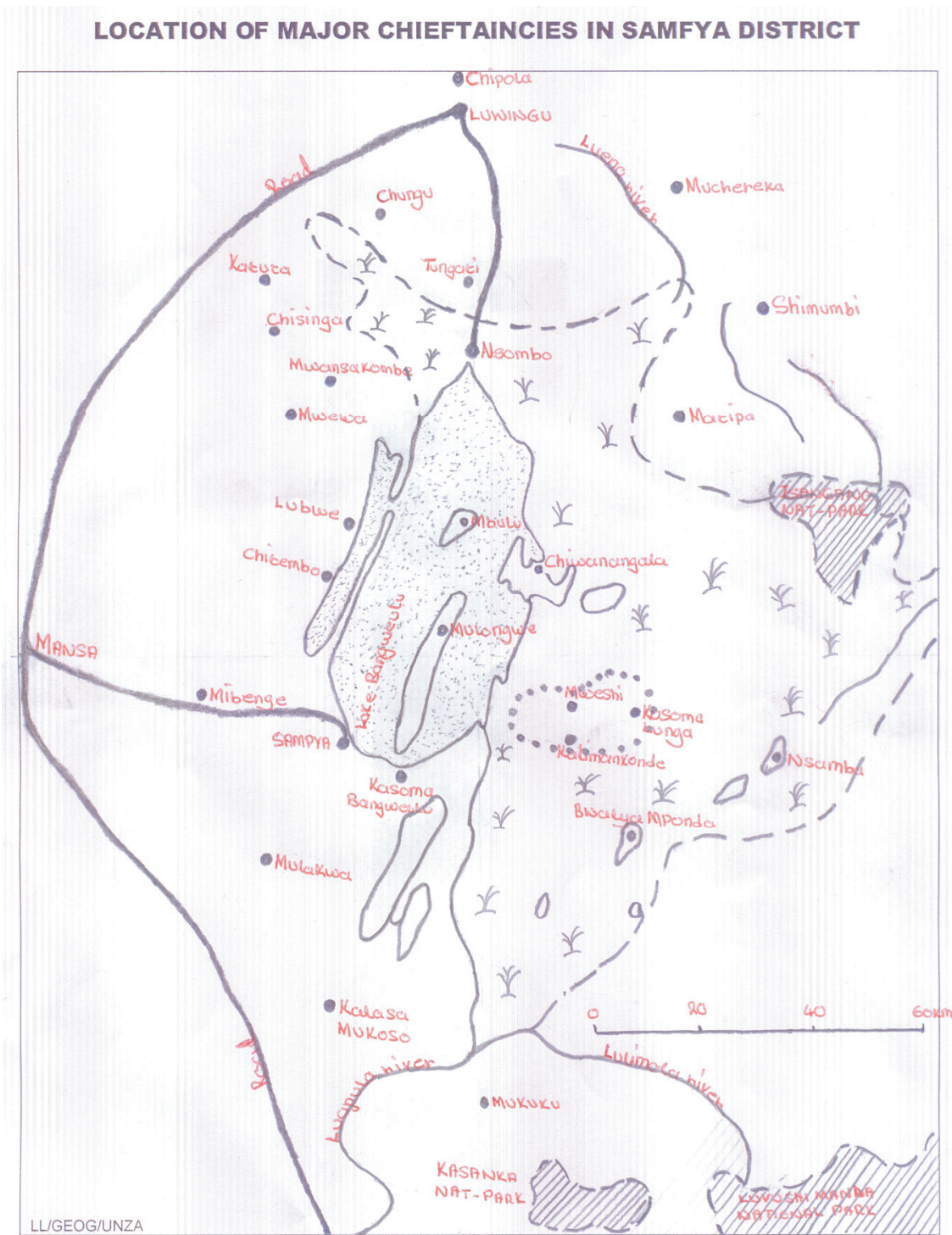


Table 2. Map of Samfya District showing the location of major chieftaincies

The Bangweulu fishery is one of the largest in Zambia and has some of the largest population densities in Samfya District. The word **Bangweulu** meant the place where the water met the sky and the fishery was usually referred to as a Bangweulu complex due to the combination of isolated lakes and swamps that form the fishery. The complex was 16 percent swamps during the rainy season when the area was flooded and receded to 10 percent permanent swamps in the dry season.³ The complex was fed by numerous rivers draining from the North and East, with the Chambeshi and Luansenshi rivers being the main ones, whose headwaters emerged from the Congo River system. Its main outlet was the Luapula River which flowed into Lake Mweru. The Bangweulu complex fishery was further joined to Lake Kampilombo through the Kampilombo canal into lakes Kang'wena, Chali, Chole and Chifungwe.

The Bangweulu fishery attracted a large number of fishing villages both temporary and permanent. Temporary fishing villages were those whose economy was partially dependent on fishing and on agricultural activities. Permanent fishing villages, on the other hand, were those whose economy predominantly depended on fishing and did not actively participate in any meaningful form of agriculture.⁴ Fishing villages in the Bangweulu complex were widespread and could be grouped into four categories based on geographical location and intensity of fishing activities. The first category covered the western half of Samfya from Lupososhi area through Lubwe and Mwamfuli to Ponga Chilonga, in chiefdoms Mwewa, Mibenge, Chitembo, Mwansakombe and Kasoma Bangweulu. The second stratum started from Mbabala Island through to Chishi Island, Chibweng'ombe, Chilubi Island and all

the nearby villages to the east of Mbabala and north of Chilubi islands. The third category stretched from Tuta Bridge covering lakes Chali, Chole, Kampolombo, Kang'wena and Chifungwe under chiefs Bwalya Mponda, Chitembo, Kafunda, Kalasa Mukosa Kasoma Bangweulu and Mulakwa. The last stratum was mostly swampy areas which stretched from the eastern part of Mbabala Island to Katamwa and covered chiefdoms Kasoma Lunga, Kalimankonde, Bwalya Mponda and Nsamba.

There were more permanent fishing villages than temporary fishing villages in Samfya District because, except for those people on Samfya mainland, Kapata Peninsular and Chief Kalasa Mukoso's area, the Unga and all the people living in the swamps who could not grow enough food, especially during high water levels, looked to fish as a buffer to avert starvation.⁵ It was true that the entire economy of the people of Samfya District evolved around fish where the lake and river villages caught fish while the hinterland villages bought and sold it. The bush villages grew cassava and millet and sold meal and beer to fish carriers and traders from Samfya District to the Copperbelt. It, therefore, followed that in times of a poor catch the entire economic base of Samfya District collapsed.

2.4 Fish in the Life of the People of Samfya District, 1935-1970

The people of Samfya District lived a communal type of life and regarded all productive resources of the area especially water bodies as communal property. The land and the waters were held by the chiefs in trust for the people. As traditional custodians of these productive assets, the chiefs presided over any matters relating to land and water bodies in their chiefdoms. With

regard to fishing, all fishermen had the freedom to fish in any chiefdom provided there was verbal consent by the chief. The material culture connected with fishing was important because even chiefs depended on fishing tribute for their wealth and prestige. Many fishermen explained that although they had preferred places where to catch fish due to fish type, they were free to fish anywhere with permission from traditional authorities.⁶ More importantly during the period when **bakapupa** (traditional priests who invoke water spirits to continue giving them fish) were performing their rituals, every fisherman had to comply by not casting nets in water during that week. However the “freedom” to fish anywhere exposed the fishermen of Samfya District to unlimited choices of fishing grounds which afforded them abundant fish resources.

2.4.1 Fishing methods

Most people in Samfya District have been catching fish for a long time and possessed wide knowledge of fish types, habitat and breeding places. With that knowledge, they have evolved various methods of catching fish depending on the type of fish they wanted, and the period of time. At subsistence level people caught fish in ponds, lagoons and streams using spears, **ulwanga** (baskets) **umono** (trap), fish poisoning using **Tephrosia** (ububa) and hand catching.⁷

Spears were used in lagoons, open water and in enclosed pools in connection with fish poisoning. Baskets were used by women in lagoons, streams and open shallow water while traps were used in streams with low currents. Hand catching was mainly used during the rainy season when the lake or river overflows its banks. When it was raining, fish such as the **imilonge** (barbel fish) and **inkomo** (**spirobranchus**) would swim in the direction of overflowing water

and after the rains, water receded, and the fish got stuck and could easily be picked by both men and women.⁸ Fish caught with the above methods were mostly for family consumption though they could be bartered for cassava meal, millet and other agricultural produce.

At semi commercial level, fishermen used large meshed nets (3"), long line fishing and **Ubwamba** (weirs). Nets were made by skilled men and the two most widely used nets were **isumbu lya mutobi**, made from a very thick string and isumbu lya **musakila**. **Isumbu lya mutobi** was used to catch **imbowa** fish (**Auchenoglanis occidentalis**), while **isumbu lya musakila** was used in the **kutumpula** method where fish was driven into the net. Usually nets were set in open water and left over night which the local people called **ukulalika**. Long line fishing on the other hand, involved stretching of a long line with baited hooks just below water surface and tied to poles in shallow water and left over night. Fish such as Barbel fish (**Mulonge**), Mud fish (**Mbowa**) and cat fish (**Mfusu, imonde, Akabombola**) were attracted to the bait.⁹

After independence and as the population of people who depended on fishing increased, some advanced methods of fishing evolved. They included **ukutumpula** both at night and day using Gill nets, **Kapopela** and **umukwau** (Seine nets). **Ukutumpula** involved laying of nets in open waters in a semi circle and then start beating the water with a dumbbell shaped wood (locally known as **akatule**) mounted on a long stick. The splash sound made by water drove the fish into the net. **Kapopela** and **umukwau** were the same except that in **kapopela**, fishing was done at night with the use of lamps or fire to attract fish. In both cases nets were laid in open waters and with the use of ropes

mounted on both ends of sinkers and floaters the net was pulled towards the shore.¹⁰

The two methods mentioned above together with **ukulalika** were very much used in the 1960s in the open waters of Lake Chali and Luapula River where much of the fish in Samfya District came from, among the Kabende and Unga people. Fishermen left their homes and constructed temporary shelters in fishing camps and stayed there from April to early November. Other fishing areas where much of the fish were caught included Lake Bangweulu for the Ng'umbo, and a few from Lakes Kampolombo, Kang'wena, Chole, Chifungwe, Chibemba, Chipyapya and Chisebwe by a mixture of those tribes.¹¹

2.4.2. **Fish processing**

The local people caught fish mainly for consumption and as an item of trade to obtain other necessities through barter. Among the Unga, for instance, fish for exchange was the only asset that attracted millet meal, cassava meal and grain sellers into the swamps. As food, fish formed the main staple relish or sauce among the people in all fishing villages without which the meal was incomplete.¹² Fish, therefore, formed an interface between the people of the swamps who were fishermen by necessity and those on the mainland who were engaged in agricultural activities.

In most communities fish was consumed fresh either by boiling or roasting it. Certain types of fish were mashed with cassava and pumpkin leaves for it to taste. In times of a good catch, the surplus was cut open and sun dried especially in the swamps where firewood was scarce. Once cut open, it was locally known as **chapatwa**. Smaller species of fish such as **Lumanse**,

Chisense and the **Kapenta** type were also sun dried. Fish which was meant for sale was smoked for it to last for a long time.¹³

2.4.3 Development of Samfya fishing industry

Fishing has been an old core economic activity of the people of Samfya District which drove the local economy forward and sustained the local people. Thus any regulatory framework that aimed at correcting certain fishing activities was viewed with suspicion and regarded as an affront on the social fabric that held the riverine communities together. A respondent at Mwamfuli village explained that the colonial administrators were always mindful about the needs of the local fishermen and when introducing any fishing legislation they ensured that, it was in the best interest of the local fishermen and traditional authorities¹⁴

The institution of Fishing Licences in 1942 ensured that, in future the people of Samfya, as a whole, benefitted from fish resources through the development of sustainable fishing methods.¹⁵ Fishing licences were meant to promote the growth of African fishing industry through selective methods of fishing while at the same time boosting the revenue of local authorities.

In order to meet Fishing Licence fee obligations, African fishermen in Samfya District intensified their fishing activities. In August 1942, Luwingu District Officer, J.G. Phillips visited the Bangweulu area and observed that the Batwa of Kansenga sand bank drifted to Lake Chali where they spent most of their time catching fish especially the **tylochromis Banguelensis** (Nsangula). Also in Chief Mulakwa's country around the shores of Kang'wena, Yombwe, Kampolombo and Mowa, Phillips found a great deal of fishing going on. Except however for Njipi on the other side of Kampolombo where commercial fishing

was going on, Phillips observed that fishing was mainly for **munani** (relish).¹⁶ The Batwa of Kansenga Sand bank were a branch of those within the Unga group in the Bangweulu swamps. That group of Batwa used to live permanently on mud piles near Lake Chali where they subsisted on meat, fish and roots of water lilies and papyrus which when split and dried were pounded into flour.¹⁷

African fishing activities in the Bangweulu fishery developed steadily during the Second World War (1939-45), due to increased demand for copper on the world market. The demand for copper ignited an increase in labour demand on the Copperbelt which culminated into increased demand for fish. As a result the Bangweulu fishery became the major supplier of fish on the Copperbelt and earnings from fish sales stood at £100 000 per annum.¹⁸

Even within the Luapula region there was increased local demand for fish in the 1950s, especially at Fort Roseberry (Mansa district) because of the growing number of colonial government workers.¹⁹ At that time fish was the major source of protein because of shortage of animal protein and other livestock in the region. The local people did not keep animals such as cattle, sheep and goats because, besides the presence of Tsetse flies, people were traditionally fishermen and cattle husbandry was not part of their culture.²⁰

With passage of time and as fish marketing opportunities started unfolding on the Copperbelt province, the trade in fish between the swamp people and mainland Samfya grew into a viable economic activity in the area. Fishermen and traders braved the dangers posed by the vast openness of Lake Bangweulu, which alternated between the dead calm at one moment and decidedly choppy at another time, to bring bundles of fish by canoe to Mwamfuli

village. At Mwamfuli village the bundles of fish were loaded on buses to the Copperbelt.²¹ These buses were owned by Africans one of whom was Luka Mumba.

When Mumba introduced a regular bus service from Mwamfuli village to the Copperbelt in 1950, it played a decisive role in the Bangweulu fish trade and in the development of Mwamfuli as a centre of fish trade.²² Owning a bus by Mumba was no mean achievement during the colonial period. Bentry Mumba, a son to Luka Mumba, explained that his father had gone to work on the mines in the Congo and upon the expiry of his contract; he came back with gold from Congo which he sold in order to raise money to buy a bus. He further narrated that the money his father raised from the bus service was used to educate his children and start other businesses one of which was Luka Mumba Guest House in Mansa.²³ Other Africans who did very well in Samfya District at that time were Chibale Kapaya, Constantino Nsemukila and Geoffrey Chinanda.²⁴

The introduction of bus services, the booming fish trade on the Copperbelt and the desire by the traders and fishermen alike to exploit the market opportunities of the Copperbelt helped to develop Mwamfuli village fully which by 1956 had grown into a central market for the Bangweulu fish trade.²⁵ In real terms, the cost of transport from Mwamfuli to the Copperbelt was greater than the previous route from Kapalala to the Copperbelt. But despite the Mwamfuli route being expensive it was preferred because of the increase in the volume of dried fish and the shortage of bicycles to take fish to Kapalala. With the increased volume of fish passing through Mwafuli which stood at 129,641lb in 1952 and 945,587lb in 1956 compared to Kapalala which recorded a decline from 1,500,000lb in 1952 to only 600lb in 1956, the Mwamfuli route became even

more economical as a trader would travel at least twice a week to the Copperbelt.²⁶

Thus more and more people preferred the Mwamfuli route because the frequency of taking fish to the Copperbelt market offset the high transport costs. For instance, a trader who took 500 pounds of dried fish would make at least £60 in cash and after all expenses would return home with £56 in cash.²⁷ As the Copperbelt mines intensified their copper production, there was increased demand for labour which ultimately translated into increased demand for fish. For instance in 1960, Copperbelt mines produced 579,000 tonnes of copper which rose to 780,000 tonnes in the 1970s.²⁸ That increase in copper production demanded a huge labour force which boosted the fishing industry of the Bangweulu. Africans invested in canoes and bicycles to facilitate easy transportation of fish to Samfya for onward transportation on buses to the Copperbelt markets.²⁹

2.5 The Role of Fish in Fostering Unity among the People of Samfya District

Fish, among the communities of Samfya District, was not only food or a trade item but also played a more important role of bringing people of diverse backgrounds together at different gatherings, where they shared various issues pertaining to the wellbeing of their societies.

2.5.1 Fish during Funerals

Charles Chilinda of Kalumbili village explained that during his time in the 1950s when there was a funeral in the village, all the young men in the neighbouring villages would be sent to the river or lake to go and catch fish to feed the

mourners who came from far away villages.³⁰ Friends and relatives of the bereaved family who had nets and canoes or boats would surrender these fishing gear freely for the young men to carry out the fishing assignment. When enough fish was caught it was distributed among the married women in that village to prepare meals for the distant mourners. As a symbol of togetherness each woman used her own mealie-meal to prepare **Nshima** (thick porridge) locally known also as **Ubwali**. To assist the bereaved family, women from neighbouring villages also donated mealie-meal to them. Chickens would only be slaughtered a day after burial when all the fire would be put off (**Isambo lyamfwa**) to signify the end of the funeral after every detail had been exhausted. In this way the bereaved family felt a sense of belonging to a larger community.³¹

2.5.2 **Fish at Male's Gatherings**

Among the riverine communities there were some species of fish which when caught attracted the appetite of elderly men of the village and was not eaten by the fisherman and his family alone. Most respondents at Chinsanka village explained that as an accepted traditional norm, a fisherman who caught such a fish as, **Mbowa** (Auchenoglamis), **Mfusu** (Chrysichthys) and Tiger fish, was expected to share with his fellow men at their usual male gathering (**Nsaka**) when that fish was cooked.³² If he did not do that he was regarded to be selfish and would be called by various names to discredit him and even barred from eating at **Nsaka**.

Similarly, when a fisherman came back from seeing his nets and found a village mate at the harbour, as an accepted practice he was supposed to give one or

two fishes to that first person who had seen the catch unless otherwise.³³ Usually the fisherman would be greeted, “**Abapalu**” (how was the catch?), and the fisherman would answer depending on the catch. If the catch was good he would give one fish or two to that person. It was interesting to learn that, that gesture was extended to fellow fishermen when two or three fishermen went out fishing and out of bad luck one of them caught nothing, the other fishermen would contribute and give the friend so that at least he could have something for relish.³⁴

2.5.3 **Fish and Social Gatherings**

The two commonest social gatherings where fish played an important role as a symbol of social cohesion and in fostering unity among the people of Samfya were Kalela dance, and sports festivities in schools. The availability of fish as the main staple and readily available relish made it possible for Samfya communities to organise Kalela dances as a way of fostering cultural exchanges. In Kapata peninsular, the prominent villages in Kalela dance were Mwanamule, Kalumbili and Musenga villages. According to the respondents, when the Mbabala island people visited the Mwanamule people for Kalela dance, the host ensured that they prepared enough fish to feed their visitors who usually arrived on Friday evening. The dancing was done on a Saturday and departure for their respective villages was on a Sunday morning. Throughout those days, the hosts made sure they fed their visitors adequately without which songs to denounce the hosts were composed.³⁵ When the Mwanamule people visited the Mbabala people the same reception was expected. Many respondents put it clear that it was very difficult for communities far away from rivers and lakes to organise such functions due to

the high cost of purchasing fish. As people interacted at such functions it created opportunities for those who wanted to marry to find and date their future partners. In some cases it also created bonds or friendships which harmonised the cultural differences that existed among the diverse groups.³⁶

Before money achieved precedence in the lives of the people, fish played an enabling role for schools to host games. When one primary school visited the other for sports, the host school managed to feed their visitors by merely asking big boys at the school to bring a specified quantity of fish and big girls to bring Cassava meal.³⁷ That was the acceptable practice because fish was the easiest commodity every parent could lay hands on. Even pupils whose parents did not own nets were able to take fish to school because fish was plenty and one could obtain it through barter, using baskets, fishing lines, weirs and spears. Fish therefore created a coherent social structure among the communities of Samfya District and created a sense of dependence on one another in times of need.³⁸

2.5.4 **Fish and Marriage**

As a major economic activity, the fishing industry had a bearing on people and their marriages. As was the case with the hunters, women preferred to be associated with good fishermen for security. When a man wanted to marry, what the in-laws wanted to establish was how many nets he or his relatives had and how good that person was in terms of fishing.³⁹ In fishing like any other activity, there were those who possessed natural luck which always attracted fish to their fishing nets and the unlucky ones who drove fish away from their

nets.⁴⁰ Parents were eager to marry off their daughters to a good fisherman because he would act as a shield to avert hunger in times of food insecurity.

When a man was courting a girl for marriage, his ability to take care of his wife was assessed by the amount of fish he supplied to the parents of the girl during courtship. In return the family of the girl would send **Nshima** at least three to four days a week to the family of the man. When the two finally got married, as per tradition, the family of the girl prepared a feast (**amatebeto**) which were taken to the family of the in-law to initiate the man to the different dishes he should expect in that family. Besides chicken, domesticated and game meat and assorted types of vegetables, fish also featured prominently on such occasions, and constituted the major component of the whole ceremony. The main types of fish found in that area would be prepared and from each type preparation would be commensurate with the method of preservation.⁴¹

Fish had a large bearing on the prevalence of marriages and the age at which people entered into matrimony in Luapula province which stood at 23.9 years for males and 20.3 years for females.⁴² In Samfya District, male children were initiated into the fishing activities at a very tender age, that by the age of 20 years a boy was capable of looking after a girl in marriage. Most respondents admitted that marriage was a very important aspect among the people in the area. The Bangweulu Frame survey documented that 92 percent of the fishermen were married.⁴³ So any one who was not married after the age of 20 years became a source of concern to the family.

2.5.5

Fish and Food Security

Fish used to be an item of the last resort and a shield that prevented starvation among the people in riverine areas. In times of low food supplies and insecurity, people in permanent fishing villages intensified their fishing activities in order to catch more fish to exchange for mealie-meal and other items from the mainland. Similarly during droughts when food supplies were low, people on the mainland sold fish for cash in order to procure food and other commodities to avert hunger. A respondent of Musema village in chief Mulakwa's area narrated that there was a group of people at Chisense village near Mowa stream who, like the Batwa, did not grow any food but exchanged fish for anything they wanted from the people of Musema and other neighbouring villages. They adopted the barter system as their mode of life and passed on this habit to their future generations.⁴⁴

2.5.6

Fish and Labour Migration

Samfya District was one area that was heavily affected by emigration of able bodied men first to the Congolese mines before the development of Zambian mines (Northern Rhodesia). One reason could have been its proximity to the Congolese copperbelt of Katanga where fish was even in higher demand. But more importantly, labour migration of able bodied young men was triggered by the introduction of Native tax first in North Eastern Rhodesia (NER) in 1901 and North Western Rhodesia (NWR) in 1904.⁴⁵ However Labour migration in the whole country was intensified in 1937 following the promulgation of Ordinances 9, 10 and 25 of 1936 which created Native Treasuries in Native authorities. All young men of taxable age were required by law to pay Native tax in monetary

form for the Native authority to finance public works and salaries for authority workers.⁴⁶ In order to meet tax obligations young men were compelled to migrate to urban areas to work in the mines, failure to which they served dehumanising jail sentences. Women, old men and the young remained in villages without energetic family members to work on the land.

But the availability of fish made it easy even for women to mobilise labour to work in their gardens. When there was work to be done, a woman would just organise enough fish and ask fellow villagers to assist clear or till the land. That was called '**imbile** or **ichima**'. Upon completion of the work, people would retire to the house of the organiser to eat the food and drink beer. In this way able bodied men were encouraged to continue working in towns while their wives remained in villages. As mentioned earlier, it was easier for anyone to get fish among the riverine people because even brothers of a woman whose husband was away would catch fish for her to organise labour. Fish was a fundamental component in the holistic development of the people of Samfya District.⁴⁷

After independence, the colonial policies that stopped people from going to urban areas without permits were removed and people started drifting to the Copperbelt in large numbers to look for employment at the mines. The increase of people at the mines increased the demand for fish which led to increased pressure on the exploitation of the Bangweulu fishery. The Zambian government further opened the Copperbelt markets to all Africans while, at the same time, relaxed the fishing regulations left by the outgoing colonial government. Those who were not employed in the mining industry joined the trade in fish whose demand opened all avenues to the people of Samfya

District. As a result the Bangweulu complex fishery assumed its greatest importance as a major supplier of fish.⁴⁸

2.6 **Social Differentiation in Samfya District**

Earlier in 1944 there was a shortage of bicycles which were the main mode of transport which took fish to Kapalala enroute to the Copperbelt. Fishermen were therefore compelled to sell their fish at the lakeside where they did not pay fish levies. When demand for fish increased further, there was an influx of fish traders in the Bangweulu complex fisheries and in order to yield maximum benefits from the fishery, fishermen found it more profitable to remain fishing than taking fish to the lakeside for sale, which move created scarcity of fish at the lakeside. Fish traders who did not want to spend many days waiting for fish from fishermen started following the fishermen to their fishing camps. The result was that Mwamfuli was no longer an attractive market for the Bangweulu fish trade because most of the fish trading activities took place in the fishing camps.⁴⁹ But the diminishing importance of Mwamfuli as a market for the Bangweulu fish trade did not affect the quantity of fish exported from the Bangweulu fishery. The overall volume of fish exported from the Bangweulu fishery increased in subsequent years.⁵⁰

After Independence in 1964, more and more fish traders mostly from the Copperbelt followed fishermen in fishing camps especially Lake Chali, Matongo and Mpanta point where the bulk of fish came from. Such traders did not want to stay long on water and so preferred to travel shorter distances from the fishing camps to the land. Thus from Lakes Chali, Matongo and Mpanta point fishing camps, the routes to Katanshya and later Chinsanka became the best

alternative shorter routes for most fish traders. By 1969, Mwamfuli market was reduced to a mere transit route by fish traders from the Copperbelt to Katanshya. For instance, in 1969 Katanshya market recorded fish sales amounting to 5,195, 656 lbs and in 1970 recorded 5,942, 776 lbs, compared to Mwamfuli market which recoded only 343, 392 lbs and 134, 072 lbs of fish sales during the same period, respectively.⁵¹

With an increase in the number of fish traders and the relaxation in fishing regulations, such as net licence fees, closed fishing season and fish permits to urban areas, the fishermen of Samfya District intensified their fishing activities by exploiting the Bangweulu fishery throughout the year in 1969 and 1970 as shown in table 2.6. below.

Table 2.6.: Sales of Dried Fish (in lbs) to the Copperbelt Province from the Bangweulu Fishery Showing Areas of Origin, 1969-1970

Month	Kabende		Ng'umbo		Unga		Total	
	1969	1970	1969	1970	1969	1970	1969	1970
Jan	229,752	195,272	15,604	25,768	176,668	139,504	422,024	360,544
Feb	92,728	136,152	6,052	16,620	59,272	58,500	158,052	211,272
Mar	71,852	136,340	4,416	17,428	31,860	14,310	108,128	168,078
Apr	57,540	108,832	4,368	8,676	70,120	87,946	132,028	205,454
May	138,544	101,784	9,892	14,620	166,308	106,612	314,744	223,016
Jun	182,020	207,612	5,476	20,836	172,812	292,132	360,308	520,580
Jul	180,576	283,992	2,720	14,436	230,160	241,856	413,456	540,284
Aug	169,624	259,172	13,116	13,948	441,676	271,176	624,416	544,296
Sep	416,512	445,496	44,724	32,556	409,780	420,728	871,016	898,780
Oct	607,736	825,264	77,820	55,120	570,232	349,672	1,255,788	1,230,056
Nov	627,464	863,556	68,140	42,352	649,472	373,308	1,345,076	1,279,216
Dec	569,984	753,468	60,228	32,244	377,180	300,376	1,007,392	1,086,088
TOTAL	3,344,332	4,316,940	312,556	294,604	3,355,540	2,656,120	7,012,428	7,267,664

Source: Central Statistical Office, **Fisheries Statistics (Natural Waters)**, p.14.

Table 2.6, demonstrates that fishing among the Kabende, Ng'umbo and Unga people had become their major activity where they expected to accrue maximum benefits following the relaxation of fishing regulations. Though much

of the fish to the Copperbelt in 1969 and 1970 came from the Kabende fishermen in Kapata peninsular, they remained the least developed in terms of investing money which they realised from fish sales in such ventures as business, good houses and education of their children.

As the capitalist money economy became entrenched, women gradually joined the fishing and fish trading business and the Bangweulu fishery witnessed an increase in the number of women fisher folks. Like their male counterparts, some of these women owned nets and boats and employed men who fished for them.⁵² The Bangweulu fishery therefore became a configuration of people who were direct fishermen and those who only owned fishing gear.⁵³

A female fish trader, Estella Chama, who has been buying fish for 20 years, explained that the entry of females into the Bangweulu fish industry had some resultant relationships between the local fishermen and urban women traders who went to buy fish.⁵⁴ Female fish traders entered into marriages of convenience with male fishermen in order to buy fish cheaply.⁵⁵ Fishermen who adopted that lifestyle spent most of their time catching fish for these urban women who at times paid them in kind. Such groups of fishermen were the poor category who made little or no profit on their investment and some of them contracted diseases which retarded their ability to work.

Another respondent, Chalwe Bwacha echoed similar sentiments and added that such relationships sometimes led to broken marriages by both parties involved and was one of the reasons why fishermen's wives started following their men to the fishing camps.⁵⁶ It also became very common for some fishermen to send their wives to the Copperbelt to sell fish while they remained behind

fishing. Some fishermen's wives who sold fish in towns made enough profits which they used to send their children to school and also bought extra fishing nets for their husbands. Other fishermen's wives spent all the money either on their relatives in towns or bought such items as plates, children's clothes, sugar, shoes and foodstuffs but returned home with nothing.⁵⁷

2.6.1 Development of Fish Subsidiary Industries in Samfya

As more and more fish traders frequented the Bangweulu fishery in the late 1950s, they created a wider market for other subsidiary businesses that were directly or indirectly dependent on fish. In most cases fish traders who went to buy fish were new to those areas and depended on the local people for upkeep, guidance and security all of which required money. Chinsanka market in Chief Mulakwa's area grew in leaps and bounds as a fishing village and became a configuration of a multiplicity of all sorts of businesses because of its proximity to Katanshya market and following the decline of Mwamfuli market. Businesses in charcoal, firewood, boats, canoes, scales, boat and canoe paddlers flourished. Others set up shops, makeshift stalls (**tuntemba**) and motor transport ventures.

Guest houses were established by the local people in the district and most of them were traditional houses which the owners opted to offer to fish traders mostly from the Copperbelt. Payment ranged from K1.00 to K5.00 per week, and the gradual but steady increase in the number of fish traders in the late 1960s contributed to growth of that business. When the traders came back from the fishing camps with bundles of fish, the guest houses were also used as

storage sheds, locally known as '**depo**', for fish awaiting transportation to towns.⁵⁸

In the fishing camps, fishermen depended on firewood to prepare food and to smoke-dried the fish. According to Kunda Chasaya, firewood sellers were charging K5.00 to fill a fibre glass boat in the late 1960s.⁵⁹ However; those who used bigger canoes had to negotiate for the prices. Charcoal on the other hand was sold to traders for use in rented houses and in fishing camps. A 50kg bag of charcoal in the late 1960s fetched K2.00 and was preferred by female fish traders because it was more convenient to use in fishing camps. As the number of fish traders continued to increase in the Bangweulu complex, Kapata peninsular suffered the worst type of deforestation which left the area with only the secondary regenerated trees due to Charcoal burning .⁶⁰

The use of scales and weight to sell fish was introduced in 1959 and replaced the old traditional system of counting the number of fish.⁶¹ After independence, the use of scales became the most acceptable method of selling and buying fish and each trader was required to hire or buy a scale to use in the fish business. Thus some people invested in buying scales which they hired out to traders at a daily fee of 20 Ngwee and weekly fee of K1.00.⁶² The local people who had enough money invested in canoes or boats which they hired out to the fishermen to carry firewood to their fishing camps and to the fish traders to buy fish in the fishing camps. To hire a boat at Katanshya and Chinsanka in the late 1960s, a trader paid K 5.00 per week and it was up to the trader to conduct the business within the agreed period. Fish traders also hired paddlers, locally known as **choba**, at the same boat fee of K 5.00 per week because the boats

were not engine powered. Besides that payment and once hired, the paddler became dependant on the fish trader for upkeep till the expiry of the contract.⁶³

Over the years the interplay of the various categories of people also gave rise to entrepreneurs in retail and wholesale trading. Some local people set up small stalls commonly known as **tuntemba** where they sold assorted groceries. Stalls were more widespread in Mwamfuli and Chinsanka villages. I was informed by one shop owner at Chinsanka that the local shops were owned by fish traders not fishermen.⁶⁴ He explained that his father set up a shop in 1968 after buying and selling fish for 15 years. In his shop he stocked all what fishermen and their families wanted and instead of buying fish with money alone, he purchased part of the fish through exchange with items in the shop. That method according to him was more profitable than using money because once the fish was sold; he made three times as much profit. At times fishermen would come or send their wives to get fishing equipment and family requirements from the shop in exchange for fish. But like in any other transaction there was cheating by some fraudulent fishermen who would get the items and “fail” to honour the promise to deliver the fish. That contributed to the collapse of some shops in Samfya District.⁶⁵

The steady growth of the Samfya fishing industry after independence compelled those that had resources to invest in the transport industry to transport fish from Samfya to the Copperbelt. In the 1950s, as mentioned earlier, fish from Samfya to the Copperbelt was transported on buses. These buses were owned by Africans such as the one introduced in 1950 by Luka Mumba. But as market opportunities in fish trading unfolded further especially after independence some shop owners, fish traders and rich fishermen invested in motor transport.

For instance, Chisabi Muwele from Ncheta who had shops at Chinsanka Ncheta bought two vehicles. Chulu Musema of Kaminsa area was one rich fisherman who had a vehicle and a shop. Chibale Kapaya in Chief Kalasa Mukosa's area had a vehicle and was a fish trader.⁶⁶ In all cases money to purchase these vehicles did not come from fish sales but from other businesses and relatives who were working in towns.

By 1970 trucks from the Bangweulu fishery could only carry bundles of fish while fish traders travelled by bus. In order to identify their bundles of fish traders wrote their names on their bundles, the town and market where the fish would be sold. Payment to the vehicle owners was based on the weight of the bundle as measured by the Fisheries Department officers. That system proved very effective because even in an event where the bundles of fish arrived earlier than the owner, market authorities or fellow traders who were present would pay the transporter and then wait for the owner to come and pay them. The emergence of an easy and efficient transportation system transformed the fish industry of Samfya even further and consequently led to the creation of three classes of fishermen, based on wealth accumulation.⁶⁷

2.6.1 **Rich Fishermen**

This category of fishermen emerged from those who owned shops, vehicles and some fish traders. They diversified into fishing when the colonial government considered the fishermen of the Bangweulu fishery, in 1959, for trading stalls in markets on the Copperbelt following their long standing requests.⁶⁸ The Kabende, Ng'umbo, Unga, Bisa and Ushi had stalls reserved for them in selected markets in Ndola, Luanshya, Kalulushi, Nkana, Kitwe and

Chingola.⁶⁹ Because of the need to accumulate more wealth, that category of business people took advantage of the positive development on the copperbelt by purchasing necessary fishing gear and employed people who caught fish for them which they sold on the Copperbelt. On average, these fishermen were able to make between £70 and £85 per year between 1959 and 1963 depending on the quantity and frequency of taking fish to towns.⁷⁰ After independence, these enterprising fishermen intensified their fishing businesses and invested in such things as adequate and suitable fishing gear, shops, descent houses and educated their children.⁷¹

But within the rich fishermen there were two categories, those who owned vehicles and those who did not. Fishermen who owned vehicles such as Chulu Musema, Chibale Kapaya and Chisabi Muwele ensured that they utilised every available opportunity to accumulate more wealth. They employed poor fishermen who caught fish for them and engaged middlemen who bought fish using money and by exchanging for goods. When they transported the fish to the copperbelt they had sales agents who sold fish for them in urban markets. The sales agents were either relatives or those who were trusted and could sell fish in the absence of the owners. With that network of fishing related activities such fishermen made more money per year, due to the frequency of taking fish to towns, than the other group of rich fishermen.

The other group of rich fishermen had no vehicles but also employed poor fishermen who caught and bought fish for them but sold the fish in urban areas themselves. Such fishermen as Chanda Yachula, Mwaba Saka, Green Mose and Banda Kope later abandoned fishing and concentrated on buying and

selling fish. Rich fishermen were thrift in their expenditure and ensured adequate returns on their investments.⁷²

2.6.2 **Middle Class Fishermen**

This category comprised of fishermen who were neither rich nor poor. They did not possess adequate fishing gear to employ helpers but depended on family labour for their fishing activities. Most fishermen in this category sold their fish to middlemen of rich fishermen in fishing camps and some of them invested their money in fishing nets, canoes, descent houses, clothes, general family upkeep and sending children to school.⁷³ Others worked for the rich fishermen and raised enough money to start their own businesses. Vinwell Kabola in the late 60s worked as a salesman in Chulu Musema's shop but later established his own small shop after which he bought some fishing nets. He could not qualify to be a rich fisherman because he did not employ helpers but depended exclusively on family labour. Similarly, Joseph Molo worked in Chisabi Muwele's shop in Chinsanka area and later started buying his own fish to sell in towns.⁷⁴

2.6.3 **Poor Fishermen**

The majority of the fishermen in Samfya District were found in this category. They did not own fishing implements except for their labour which they used to earn a living. They were employed in all sorts of fishing activities ranging from ferrying firewood and paddling fish traders to catching and processing fish for the rich and middle class fishermen. Whatever they earned was spent on their families but much of it was spent on beer drinking. Most of them did not manage to send their children to school because they spent most of the time in fishing camps catching fish for their masters who in most cases provided them

with only the basic necessities of life. This category regarded the fishery as a mine where they could get fish without realising that fish was a wasting resource.⁷⁵

However towards the late 60s and early 70s, fish stocks started declining due to increased numbers of fishermen and fish traders that sought their livelihood on fish resources. The Bangweulu complex fishery was suffocated beyond capacity of fishermen it could accommodate. Most businesses which depended on the fish trade could not be sustained due the depletion of fish stocks. There was no fish on which the viability and profitability of all businesses depended. Shops in that area, therefore, became seasonally dependent on the availability of fish.⁷⁶

2.7 **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the lifestyle of the fishing communities of Samfya District and explained how fish played a central role in driving the local economy forward. I have particularly devoted much time giving examples of the various aspects of human activities which had been directly or indirectly influenced by the presence of fish in the area. I have also shown how colonial intervention in fish marketing for the Bangweulu fishermen on the copperbelt, gave rise to a formidable group of entrepreneurs which ultimately led to social stratification among the fishermen in Samfya District. In the next chapter I will discuss some of the various factors that contributed to poverty among some fishermen in Samfya District despite the abundant fish resources in the area

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CHAPTER THREE

3.0 CAUSES OF POVERTY AMONG SOME FISHERMEN OF SAMFYA DISTRICT

3.1 Introduction

Poverty is relative and varies from society to society. Among fishermen poverty refers to an individual's inability to own adequate number of suitable fishing gear such as nets and boats. The causes of poverty among some fishermen of Samfya District were multifaceted and are rooted in the social and cultural fabric of the fishing societies. This chapter first examines the primary factors inherent in the fishermen themselves and later discusses the secondary factors which directly and indirectly perpetuated poverty among some fishermen in Samfya District.

3.2 Primary Causes of Poverty

The primary causes of poverty among the fishermen of Samfya District included among other things lack of knowledge, dependence on family labour, entry of women fish traders from the Copperbelt, absence of alternative sources of income and underdeveloped agriculture.

The fishing industry in Samfya District was characterised by various obstacles which allowed price differences in different fishing villages. While fishermen strove to maximise prices for their catch, fish traders used every available avenue to pay minimum prices in order to obtain a lot of fish and enjoy the best value for their money. Most fishermen in the Bangweulu fishery lacked

adequate knowledge on how to add value to their fish in order to uplift their living standards. They caught a lot of fish but did not take time to preserve it for sale in lucrative urban markets and create more wealth. Instead, fish traders from towns bought fish from fishermen at low prices and took it to towns where they sold it at higher prices.¹ This exploitation of fishermen was also noted by Mulongo who wrote thus;

From 1935 however the growing fish trade till 1939 did not bring substantial prosperity to fishermen due to exploitation by European traders who bought at low prices from Africans and sold to the Copperbelt. In 1939 for instance European traders bought at 1d and 1 ½d per pound and yet those Africans who disregarded those middlemen sold the same fish at 3d on the copperbelt.²

Mulongo noted that Europeans who bought fish from Africans in the Bangweulu fishery through their **Kapitaos** took advantage of fishermen's inability to take fish to urban markets. They offered lower prices to fishermen which perpetuated poverty among some fishermen.

The exploitation of fishermen was not peculiar to European traders alone; it was intensified by African fish traders who had come on the scene after independence. These capitalist oriented African fish traders developed equally exploitative methods of obtaining fish from the fishermen through exchange with assorted types of merchandise. A female fish trader explained that, it was cheaper and faster to obtain fish from fishermen through exchange with various items such as bicycles, clothes and basic necessities than using money. For instance a bicycle costing K30.00 in 1970 could earn a trader three 50kg bags of dried fish, whose real value³ was three times the cost of a bicycle³.

Due to the lack of knowledge of the prices of these items, fishermen found themselves embroiled in a state of destitution where they were deprived of the fullest benefits on their catch and became hopelessly dependent on the traders for basic necessities.⁴ When compared to how much these items were bought on the Copperbelt and how much they were sold to the fishermen in fishing camps, it became clear that the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of the Kwacha on these items always favoured the fish traders.

Most middle class fishermen in Samfya District had no capacity to employ helpers because they did not possess adequate fishing gear but depended on family labour for their fishing activities. Without adequate fishing gear their catch was always poor and sold only a little for basic necessities. The poor catch resulting from inadequate fishing gear was a cause of poverty among the majority of the fishermen. On the other hand, fishermen who took fish for sale at the lakeside market in Mwamfuli village were subjected to the controlled market prices and government levies. Fishermen, therefore, realised that by remaining on water, they could catch more fish to offset the differences between the controlled market prices at Mwamfuli market on the one hand and the lower black market price in fishing camps without expenses on the other.⁵

Though the fishermen found it more profitable to remain on water throughout, the same idea contributed to their poverty because by being confined to fishing camps where the traders followed them, they were completely detached from the prevailing market situations in Samfya mainland and let alone lucrative Copperbelt markets. The result was that from 1944 there emerged a group of people especially among the Unga and Batwa who, because of their isolated swamp environment, had limited exposure and deprived their children access to

education.⁶ They were born and bred in swamps and some had never visited Samfya mainland where they could have experienced a different lifestyle. Such people were victims of perpetual exploitation by fish traders whom they depended on for the supply of basic necessities.

Before independence fish trade was a preserve of the men folk but after independence and with the unfolding of fish marketing opportunities in urban areas, females mostly from the copperbelt joined the fish trade industry which robbed many fishermen of their benefits. Some fishermen in fishing camps entered into marriages of convenience with women fish traders whose intention was to get fish at lower prices.⁷ Fishermen who had fallen victims of female fish traders laboured to catch fish for these women in exchange for sex and second hand clothes. That system was more pronounced in Lake Chali in the late 1960s because of a high concentration of fishermen who remained poor at the expense of women fish traders.

Furthermore, fishermen in Samfya District regarded the fishery as a mine where they would continue getting fish indefinitely without realising that, over time, fish catches per fisherman diminished with an increased fishing population. Fishermen were supposed to conduct their fishing activities sustainably with regard to time and methods of fishing and the type of fishing gear at different times of the year. But even the little money they realised from fish sales, many fishermen spent it on beer drinking. Apart from the rich and a few middle class fishermen who spent part of their money to educate their children, none of the poor fishermen invested money in educating their children.⁸ That situation made poverty a vicious cycle among some fishermen in Samfya District.

As mentioned earlier fishing was the major viable industry in Samfya District and so every aspect of life in the District depended on fish. In areas such as the Gwembe valley where agricultural activities were widespread, fishing was regarded as a shield that cushioned the impact of poor crop yields and was merely an alternative source of income.⁹ But in Samfya District, agriculture was not very much developed to be an alternative source of income. Many fishermen revealed that, sometimes they resorted to using prohibited methods of fishing in order to survive.¹⁰ In times of low fish supplies fishermen resorted to the use of mosquito nets, fish weirs locally known as **ubwamba** and baskets, which regrettably led to the depletion of some fish species because some of the methods destroyed fish eggs.

Most fishermen in Samfya District did not venture into agricultural activities because, as Roland Hill, District Commissioner for Samfya District observed in 1960, people's income from fishing compared very favourably with rural incomes in the rest of the country.¹¹ Along the lake however, where cassava was the main crop, agriculture was intense. Millet, monkey nuts and sweet potatoes were grown in small quantities which allowed trade to develop between people along the lake and those in senior chief Kalasa Mukoso's area. But one of the major agricultural difficulties of Samfya District was that most people were fishermen and were not interested in agricultural activities, because they lived and had lived for a large number of years close to the Lake. Failure by the fishermen to engage in agricultural activities contributed to their poverty especially during the closed fishing season.

3.3

Secondary Causes of Poverty

Among the secondary causes of poverty were the absence of credit facilities for the fishermen, poor marketing system, unreliable transport, and lack of capacity building among the fishermen as well as increased fishing population. The Bangweulu fishery was one of the largest suppliers of fish to the Copperbelt but was again the least developed among the fisheries in the country. W.V. Brelsford noted this when he was District Commissioner for Mufulira (1942-44):

out of the existing fisheries in the country at that time, the Bangweulu, Luapula, Lukanga, Barotseland, Luchazi and Chokwe, the bulk of fish came from the Bangweulu via Kapalala and most of it was brought by native cyclists.¹²

Though the Bangweulu fishery was the major supplier of fish to the Copperbelt, Samfya remained comparatively least developed because the majority of fish traders resided on the Copperbelt. The fish traders were not obliged to invest their money in the development of Samfya but only used it to extract its wealth for their well being in urban areas while the fishermen remained poor.

The abundant fish resources of the Bangweulu were also acknowledged by J.P. Murray, Provincial Commissioner for Northern Province when he advised on the Draft Fisheries Development Ordinance in 1952. He advised that if the fishermen, women and peddlers would be restricted in their trade, only those of Mweru and Bangweulu which were richer in fish.¹³ Murray's advice was aimed at restricting Africans to fully engage in fish trade so that Europeans could set up public utility companies to be buying fish in the Bangweulu fishery. Though Murray recommended the establishment of fish marketing public utility

companies in the two areas and whose corporate social responsibility should benefit the Africans. However, the idea remained on paper.

While the colonial and post colonial governments provided financial assistance to fishermen especially those in Mweru-Luapula, those in Bangweulu were neglected. For example, the shortage of meat on the Copperbelt during the Second World War compelled the District Commissioner (DC) for Kawambwa to push the colonial authorities to develop the fish industry of Mweru-Luapula which resulted in the construction of the gravel road from Kawambwa to Mulwe village in 1949.¹⁴ That road opened Mweru-Luapula to the Copperbelt traders and also the local fishermen and traders were able to transport their fish to the Copperbelt markets. Furthermore the government introduced a loan scheme to assist Mweru-Luapula fishermen to buy better nets and big boats which led to the establishment of a boat making school at Nchelenge in 1955.¹⁵ With these interventions Mweru-Luapula fishermen were able to harness the fullest potential of the fish resources compared to the Bangweulu fishermen.

Lack of institutional credit was therefore an obstacle to the development of the Bangweulu fishery. Credit was needed especially by the poor fishermen to buy boats and nylon nets and to repairing their fishing equipment.¹⁶ Rich fishermen, for instance, made between £70 and £80 in an average year from fish sales between 1959 and 1963, but spent about £15 procuring new nets and repair of boats.¹⁷ The need for institutional credit compelled the Acting Commissioner for Native Development to apply for a grant of £400 to the Native Authority in 1955, which was intended to grant loans to the fishermen of the Bangweulu to purchase boats. Though the grant was approved, loans were not given to the fishermen.¹⁸ Thus in almost all fishing villages in Samfya District the canoe

remained the most widely used by fishermen due to lack of credit facilities to acquire boats. In the absence of boats which could be used in high waters, the fishermen of Samfya District used **ukutumpula** method which was confined to low waters. Besides the **kutumpula** method driving fish into small gill nets, the method also destroyed the fish breeding grounds which led to depletion of fish stocks and perpetuating poverty even further.¹⁹

After independence the post colonial government continued to promote the welfare of fishermen in the country through financial and material support. Between 1966 and 1970, the Credit Organisation of Zambia (COZ) gave out K43, 000.00 in loans to fishermen countrywide and distributed subsidised fishing nets from Nkwazi net manufacturer.²⁰ While fishermen countrywide benefitted from post colonial government assistance the fishermen of Samfya were not considered, probably due to lack of adequate and effective representation in parliament, and that contributed to their poverty.

All fishing gear and methods were inherently selective by their design and operation and different fish species had very different catch abilities due to their habitat preferences and individual behaviour.²¹ In essence, it meant that fish resources of the open lake were not exploited because fishing in the lake were confined to seine netting in shallow waters. Lack of adequate fishing craft therefore, led to unselective fishing pattern which exerted higher fishing pressure on the smaller species and prevented the exploitation of the deeper waters which harboured fish of considerable size.²²

Besides lack of credit facilities to the fishermen of Samfya District, there was no organised market with regulated government prices where fishermen could sell

their fish. All efforts to establish a dependable fish market in Samfya District failed. In 1947, T. Vaughan Jones, the Director of Game and Tsetse Control objected to the proposal to set up a company in the Bangweulu area that could buy fish from the local fishermen. Jones' argument was that the move would conflict with the African fishing interests.²³

Furthermore, in 1952, a company known as Copperfields Cold Storage Co. Ltd whose proprietors were Kellenbert and L. Pinshow, wanted to organise fresh fish trade in the Bangweulu area, with suitable boats and refrigeration installations. Unfortunately the company's request was also turned down by the Director of Game and Tsetse Control who falsely claimed that there were already signs of over-fishing in the area.²⁴

The use of scales as a measure when selling dried fish impoverished the Bangweulu fishermen even further because huge quantities of fish was sold at a lower price. As the fish marketing opportunities started unfolding in the early 1960s, fish traders from the copperbelt started buying fish using scales and weights instead of the usual method of counting the numbers of fish. The scales were heavy duty and favoured the fish traders because they loaded a lot of dried fish to reach a pound and were not suitable for small species of fish.²⁵ The fishermen lost out because they parted away with huge quantities of fish with minimum returns, the situation which led to the poverty of the fishermen.

Besides losing out on the use of scales when selling fish, poor road infrastructure inhibited the development of the Bangweulu fishery and consequently contributed to poverty among the fishermen of Samfya District. In Mweru-Luapula, for instance, the government constructed a gravel road from

Kawambwa to Mulwe village in 1949 which opened the area to the Copperbelt markets.²⁶ But in Samfya District, the proposal to construct a road along the watershed of Luombwa and Lulimala rivers was turned down by the Fisheries Advisory Committee. The proposed road was very important because it was meant to divert Bangweulu fishermen from using Kapalala-Sakania route to Ndola. Furthermore, if that proposed road was financed, it could have enhanced trade in the Bangweulu area and consequently fishermen could have benefitted by taking fish to the Copperbelt markets easily.

There was also lack of training to prepare the fishermen on future fishing prospects. In Samfya District, the colonial and later post colonial governments did not sensitise fishermen on the importance of sustainable fishing and closed fishing season which could have helped fishermen to diversify into agriculture. If fishermen were trained to diversify into other commercial activities especially during the fish ban, they could have appreciate its long term effect.

However, many of the training proposals that would have benefitted the fishermen in the Bangweulu fishery did not reflect the aspirations of the local fishermen. In 1954 for instance, the **Livingstone Mail** reported about the joint Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland Fish Research Station to be built at Samfya on Lake Bangweulu. The station was to be staffed by scientists working at the joint Fish Research station at Nkata Bay on Lake Nyasa.²⁷ Unfortunately when the main unit for that project was set up in 1955, only the Headquarter offices and laboratory were at Samfya, the Research Fish Farm was put at Fort Rosebery (Mansa).²⁸ Initially the project was to help the fishermen improve local methods of fishing and introduce new fishing methods suitable for African fishermen.

And when the project was implemented its main focus changed to a comprehensive survey of the ecology of the Bangweulu region with a view to determining the cause of, and the possibility of remedying the low productivity of the Lake. It also embarked on investigating the nature and extent of the swamp fishery and possibility for improvement which was never done. Finally, the project started compiling a representative collection of Northern Rhodesian fishes with a view to producing a check list. All the activities the project embarked on had no direct relevance to the fishermen, who were supposed to be the direct beneficiaries.

The fishermen of the Bangweulu fishery had always been fishing and had developed a fishing pattern that suited their local conditions. Over the years they evolved well balanced fishing strategies tuned to maximise the exploitation of fish stocks in all their diversity, using a combination of gears, methods and mesh sizes without over exploiting the fish stocks.²⁹ What fishermen therefore needed were practical government interventions to supplement their local fishing initiatives.

After independence the Zambian government at first maintained the colonial government's Fish Conservation Ordinance of 1955 which took into account the interests of the local fishermen by enforcing the fish ban during the fish breeding period, from 30th November to 1st March, to ensure adequate future supplies of fish.³⁰ Though fishermen saw the fish ban as an affront on their only means of livelihood, its relaxation in later years after independence resulted in unrestricted influx of migrant fishermen. That culminated into an increased fishing population which increasingly made it difficult for individual fishermen to make a living out of the fishery due to decreased catch per fisherman.

3.4

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed a number of key issues especially those that contributed to poverty among some fishermen of Samfya District. It has particularly shown how the colonial and Zambian governments failed to provide financial and infrastructural assistance to the Bangweulu fishermen while their counterparts in other fisheries in the country, such as Mweru-Luapula, were supported. Besides lack of government interventions, the chapter has examined the attitude of Bangweulu fishermen, especially for regarding the fishery as a renewable resource. Failure by the Bangweulu fishermen to engage in other means of livelihood such as agriculture as an alternative source of income perpetuated poverty among them.

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CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 GOVERNMENT POLICIES *VIS-À-VIS* SAMFYA FISHING INDUSTRY

4.1 Introduction

The colonial government used various pieces of legislation to run the affairs of their colonial territories. Policies were used as a tool for effective control of the natives in the colonised territories and to maintain law and order. In the fishing industry of Samfya District, the colonial government introduced various legislations aimed at regulating the fishing activities among the local people. This chapter examines some of the colonial and Zambian governments' policies on the fishing industry and shows how they affected the fishing industry of Samfya District.

4.2 Net Licences Regulations

Measures to control the fishing activities of the local people by the colonial administration in Northern Rhodesia was prompted by the sudden disappearance of the **mpumbu** (*Labeo altivelis*) species in lake Mweru in 1937.¹ The local African fishermen blamed the depletion of the species on increased fishing activities by European commercial fishermen. Thus in 1942 fishing regulations provided for restrictions in the mesh size of fishing nets to three inches which became a major complaint among the local fishermen.² In 1943 net licences throughout the Bangweulu and surrounding areas were instituted.³

Although the fish conservation measures were helpful in ensuring future supplies of fish, the local African fishermen felt that the restrictions on the mesh size of nets were irksome and irritating. That was because the restrictions prevented them from catching small fishes such as **lumanse (Alestes)** and **Kasepa** which could not be caught with bigger meshed nets of three inches.⁴ Further restrictions were on the use of traps, baskets and weirs. What the colonial authorities failed to understand was that the Bangweulu was a multispecies fishery comprising over 83 species of 13 taxonomic families.⁵ These families were of varying sizes which could not be harvested with bigger meshed nets only.

In order to exploit these species different fishing gears were to be used because using certain prescribed meshed nets meant selective method of fishing which exerted pressure on certain species only. For instance, **kasepa** and **imanse** did not grow to a length of six inches that could be caught with a three inch meshed net; many of them were much smaller in their own size and needed smaller meshed nets. Even the disappearance of the **mpumbu (Labeo altivelis)** species in Lake Mweru in 1937 could have been due to migration because fish population fluctuated over time with or without fishing.⁶

The colonial government also introduced fishing regulations in the Bangweulu fishery because of the local population that was exploiting the fisheries indiscriminately. The 1943 net licensing regulation was meant to control indiscriminate fishing methods while at the same time ensure future supplies of fish. The regulation prescribed that only nets with 3 inch mesh size were to be used in the Bangweulu fishery so that only big species of fish could be caught. Each fisherman paid licence fees according to the number of nets.⁷

But Chief Kasoma Bangweulu, in 1953, wrote to the District Commissioner at Samfya complaining about the restrictions on the mesh size of the nets. The chief wondered why small meshed nets were not allowed so that small fishes could be caught by Africans because the Europeans were allowed to use nets with small holes.⁸ What mostly displeased the chief was the colonial authorities' segregation in their application of net licence laws. For instance, when an African fisherman paid tax for fish nets, government authorities measured the mesh size so that if the hole was small the nets were banned, but if the nets belonged to a European fisherman they were spared.

Local African fishermen resented the restrictions on the size of mesh nets because of lack of sufficient propaganda by the government to explain the future benefits of the regulations.⁹ John Harold Courtney Edmonds, District Commissioner for Fort Rosebery also noted during his tour of villages south of Samfya that people did not understand the meaning of the regulations because they had been catching plenty of fish in the past and did not see any reason why they should be restricted.¹⁰ But after certain considerations fishing with small mesh nets was allowed for smaller fish species such as **lumanse** (Alestes) while traps, baskets and weirs were allowed for **kasepa**. Also school children of less than 15 years old were allowed to use any size of net because they wanted them to raise money for school requisites and food.¹¹

Though the local people resisted the fish conservation policies due to lack of adequate propaganda from colonial officials on the future benefits, the measures were intended to ensure continuity in future fish production for the local people and boost revenue for local authorities. In 1944, for example, with the colonial fish conservation measures in place, the Unga Native Authority,

collected £385 in fish net licences while the Bisa Native Authority managed £142.¹² The regulation ensured that fish had enough time to breed and grow to full size which guaranteed availability of fish stocks to the fishermen at all times.

4.3 **Regulations on Fishing Methods**

Regulations on fishing methods were a follow up to the net licensing regulations and were also part of the conservation strategies. In 1950, for instance, N.D. Paine, Fisheries Officer at Fort Rosebery suggested to prohibit the use of weirs on grounds that a large number of immature fish was being caught.¹³ Even recently a respondent at Chinsaka, Wilson Mango, expressed similar fears on the use of weirs, that it was the worst fishing method because it was non-selective and destroyed both immature fish and fish eggs.¹⁴ He further explained that in Kafinda and Chiundaponde areas of Mpika, the use of weirs during the fish spawning periods was widespread.

Similarly, the acting Director of Game and Tsetse Control also indicated in 1951, the threat posed by the indiscriminate use of weirs in the Bangweulu area on the sustainability of fish stocks.¹⁵ He proposed the need to either ban them completely or introduce weir licences at the same rate for larger African nets so that the fee could act as a deterrent. On the contrary, though the acting Fisheries Officer acknowledged the widespread use of weirs in Bangweulu, he objected to the idea of weir licences.¹⁶ He argued that the fish caught in weirs was not enough and licencing them would be unpopular among the local people especially that most of them did not possess and could not afford the recommended fishing gear.

In 1953 the Fisheries Development Ordinance was promulgated and put in place a fisheries board which was mandated to promote, regulate and organise the catching and selling of fish.¹⁷ The Board was also supposed to finance schemes related to the selling of fish, provide guidelines on the selling of fish by the fishermen and to procure sustainable fishing implements and lease them to the fishermen. The idea was to compel the fishermen to abandon the use of weirs so that in the long run they could be banned. Unfortunately, those well intended measures were not implemented in Samfya District and the use of weirs continued to overexploit certain species of the fish stocks in the Bangweulu fishery.

In 1955, the government promulgated the Fish Conservation Ordinance under which certain practices such as the use of poison and explosives for fishing were prohibited throughout Northern Rhodesia.¹⁸ The ordinance gave powers to the Governor-General to prohibit or regulate fishing with respect to the use of boats, nets, traps, weirs, stakes, earthworks and similar obstructions. The Governor General also had powers to determine the size of fish of a particular species that could not be killed and which period of the year the fish ban should be enforced.

The same ordinance gave powers to the Director of Game and Tsetse Control to issue a general net licence and an African net licence that allowed Africans to fish using nets in the Native Authority area and African net licences were to be renewed annually.¹⁹ It now meant that no person was allowed to fish in any prescribed area without a net licence. As pointed out earlier when introducing a policy the colonial authorities were mindful of the plight of the local people. Instructions were given to the Native Authorities on the licensing measures and

fees to be adopted. For instance, in areas where fishing was exclusively of local nature, the ordinance left the conservation and licencing measures to be implemented by the Native Authorities.²⁰

With that authority certain developmental decisions were implemented by some local authorities in the Bangweulu fishery. Following the reported poor fishing methods in Lake Chifunabuli, a meeting was called by the Ngumbo Native Authority in 1956 at which the Samfya Fish Ranger expounded the merits of fish conservation.²¹ As a result, the Ngumbo Native Authority declared a closed fishing season for seine nets from 1 September to 28 February each year. The fisheries concillors were mandated to enforce the regulation.

The same ordinance compelled the Samfya local authority to introduce a fish levy in November 1959. Since the levy was promulgated by the local authorities who were the custodians of the fishing grounds, it was accepted by the fishermen because they understood it.²² As a result, the Unga treasury received £340 from the levy fund in April 1960 which was a positive development. Most of the levy revenue from Unga fishermen was collected by clerks at Samfya check post and that was possible because some Unga fishermen used the Bangweulu Water Transport Service (BWTS), which was based in Samfya, to transport their fish. In the same year the Ng'umbo, Kabende and Unga Native Authorities imposed a fish levy of *1d* per pound weight of dried fish exported outside their Native Authority areas.²³

The local authorities were flexible in their net licence levy collections because they understood the fluctuations in fish catches as opposed to the colonial officials. Local Authorities took into account how much fish was caught in a

particular year and that became the basis for levy collection. In 1960 for instance, there was less fish caught in the Ng'umbo area which resulted in the reduction of net licence levy collection. So out of the projected £350 revenue only £87 was collected because most Ng'umbo fishermen were fishing in Unga waters where they were compelled to pay unresidential licence fees.²⁴ Because of that negative development the Assistant Executive officer, Franklin Temba proposed to reduce net licence fees in the Ng'umbo area to enable those willing to fish on a small scale to do so.

4.4 Fish Marketing Regulations

Fish trade in the Bangweulu area was haphazard and chaotic due to the absence of a market and reliable road infrastructure. Efforts to set up institutions that could help in the marketing of fish from the Bangweulu fishery were at times frustrated by colonial officials in the guise of protecting local fishermen's interests. To transport fish to the Copperbelt the most reliable route was through Belgian Congo where the government imposed restrictions on transit fish and produce across the Pedicle road to the Copperbelt.²⁵ Transit through the Congo was only allowed by motor transport and one had to obtain a permit for 20 tons of dried fish from the District Commissioner at Fort Rosebery. Since Bangweulu had no ice plant to propel fresh fish trade, it was also time consuming to dry up 20 tons of fish for one to obtain a permit.

The linking of Samfya District to the colonial capitalist economy of the Copperbelt created the need for market spaces where fishermen and fish traders from Bangweulu could sell their fish. In October 1958, the Unga Native Authority complained to the colonial governor, when he visited Ncheta Island

that there were no stalls for Bangweulu fishermen in the markets on the Copperbelt.²⁶ The governor assured the Native Authority that arrangements would be made reserve stalls at all markets on the Copperbelt. In May 1959 therefore, the fishermen of the Bangweulu were considered for stalls at the Copperbelt markets. Stalls were reserved for fishermen and traders from Kabende, Ushi, Ng'umbo, Unga and Bisa tribal waters.²⁷ This was meant to help the Bangweulu fishermen harness maximum benefits from their fish in the booming Copperbelt markets. Market authorities in different copperbelt towns prescribed the times when reserved stalls would be taken up by the Bangweulu fishermen and traders on a daily basis failure to which such stalls would be re-allocated to other traders.

In Ndola for instance, 12 stalls were reserved at the Main Location market, and four stalls were reserved at each Location markets in Kabushi and Chifubu. The stalls were to be taken up by 09:30 hours each day. In Luanshya at Roan Antelope Mine market twelve stalls were reserved and at Luanshya Municipal Market six stalls were reserved and would be taken up by 09:00 hours each day. At the Main African Market in Kalulushi six stalls were reserved on daily basis which were to be taken up at the same time as those for Ndola markets.²⁸

And at Nkana's Mindolo Location Market four stalls were reserved; Wusakile North Location Market eight stalls, at Wusakile F Section Location Market two stalls and at Wusakile South Location Market one stall. Unlike other towns, stalls in Nkana markets were to be applied for before 15:00hours a day before.²⁹ In Kitwe, at Buchi Location, Kapembwa Location and Kwacha Location Markets four stalls were reserved at each market which were to be

taken up by 07:30 hours. In Chingola at Chiwempala Location old and new markets two and four stalls were reserved, respectively.

In order to use those stalls however, fish traders and fishermen obtained passes of entitlement from fish check posts at Mwamfuli, Kapalala and Chembe. Where the number of fish traders and fishermen from the Bangweulu waiting to trade on a particular day exceeded the reserved stalls, they were allowed to conduct their trade if accommodation was available in that particular market.³⁰ But as it turned out most of the reserved stalls were not taken up because most Bangweulu fishermen opted to sell their fish at the lakeside to avoid taxes and as mentioned earlier, wanted to continue fishing while trading.

That fish marketing arrangement by the colonial authorities benefited only a few rich Bangweulu fishermen but became a driving force in the creation of classes among the fishermen of Samfya District. Rich fishermen such as Chulu Musema, Chibale Kapaya and Chisabi Muwele utilised the fish marketing arrangements and accumulated their fullest benefits. To such fishermen, it was very easy for them to reinvest their money in motor transport business, especially after independence, which gave them multiplier effects on their investments. They accrued enough money which they used to build descent houses, educated their children and saved some income.

However, a fish trader and proprietor of Malilang'oma Shopping Centre in Samfya, J. Chitumbo, stated that even the independent Zambian government did nothing to help the Bangweulu fishermen with fish marketing arrangements.³¹ Lack of workable government intervention in the fishing industry of Samfya District left the majority of the fishermen at the mercy of

exploitative fish traders and contributed to the underdevelopment of the fishery compared to Mweru-Luapula fishery which received colonial and post colonial government attention.³²

4.5. The Fish Conservation Act CAP 314 of the Laws of Zambia

After independence the government gradually relaxed the colonial government's Fish Conservation Ordinance of 1955 which had taken into account the interests of the local fishermen and also ensured sustainable utilisation of the fisheries resources. Government issued notice (GN) No. 277 of 1964 and statutory instruments (SI) No. 30 of 1964 and No. 69 of 1965 to effect amendments to the 1955 colonial Conservation Ordinance. It became known as the Fish Conservation Act Cap 314 of the Laws of Zambia. The new Act was supposed to enforce the fish control measures used by the colonial government which safeguarded the interests of local fishermen and ensured continuity of future supplies of fish.

However part three of the new Act gave express powers to the Minister of Lands and Natural Resources to grant a special fishing licence to authorise the use of any illegal fishing method which was prohibited by the colonial government.³³ The Zambian government also decontrolled most fishing activities in the country which culminated into a proliferation of indiscriminate fishing methods.³⁴ There was now free movement of migrant fishermen which led to increased fishing population, especially in the Bangweulu fishery which consequently exerted fishing pressure beyond the fishery's carrying capacity. That also made it difficult for individual local fishermen to make a meaningful living out of the fishery, hence the poverty of most fishermen.

Political interference in technical decisions curtailed the ability of the Department of Fisheries to enforce legislation to control entry and movement of migrant fishermen who did not care about fish conservation. Net licensing and closed fishing season during fish breeding were also relaxed and this led to over exploitation of fish stocks by fishermen in the Bangweulu fishery which ultimately led to a decline in fish catches per fisherman.³⁵ The Bangweulu fishery was heavily exploited with the use of illegal fishing methods such as weirs, poison, gill netting and mosquito nets which the colonial authorities had outlawed.³⁶ The absence of effective regulatory framework on fishing activities led to fish migration and depletion of certain species of fish in most fisheries.³⁷

4.6 **Conclusion**

Fishing regulations were necessary for sustainable fish utilisation and continuity of future fish production in the country. Since many people sought their livelihoods in fish resources it was important to provide guidelines on how to manage the fisheries in the country to ensure that future generations could also use the same resource. This chapter has discussed how the colonial government controlled fishing activities in the country through various legal instruments. It has demonstrated that the colonial government considered the interests of the local fishermen first and implemented certain legislations through Native Authorities who were custodians of the fishermen and fishing grounds. The chapter has also shown how the independent Zambian government relaxed the colonial fish conservation strategies, a development that led to indiscriminate use of poor fishing methods which eventually led to overfishing and depletion of certain species of fish stocks in the Bangweulu fishery.

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CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 CONCLUSION

Fishing was the third most important industry in Zambia after farming and mining. The majority of the people especially in Samfya District were employed in fishing and fish related activities. The entire economy of Samfya District depended on fishing and the decline in fish stocks automatically affected all sectors of the economy in the district. This study has observed that the fishermen of Samfya District caught and sold a lot of fish but most of them did not benefit from the abundant fish resources due to a combination of factors.

The study has demonstrated that fishing was the only viable industry in Samfya District but the fishermen did not realise that the industry was a diminishing resource which needed sustainable utilisation. Local fishermen regarded the fishing grounds as a mine where they would fish throughout their lives without fish being depleted. They, therefore, employed a variety of fishing methods some of which were destructive such as fish poisoning, weirs and mosquito nets which destroyed immature fish, fish eggs and fish breeding nests. In turn, this led to a decline in certain species of fish stocks.

It was observed that most local fishermen were poor because of their lifestyle. Most fishermen of Samfya District did not invest their money in productive ventures, but spent much of it on beer drinking while some of them spent it on women because they believed fish would always be there in lakes and rivers and they would find it whatever time they went to fish. While the rich and a few middle class fishermen managed to educate their children from their earnings,

the poor fishermen did not and ended up forcing their children into early marriages where they wallowed in poverty.

Fish acted as a catalyst in uniting the fishermen of Samfya District but the fishermen themselves did not unite to create wealth for themselves. They did not form fishing cooperatives to handle issues such as marketing, fish pricing, acquisition of fishing equipment and diversification into other business ventures. Each fisherman fixed his/her own price which depended on how urgent he/she needed the money and also on the bargaining experience of the trader. In most cases, traders bought fish at lower prices because they bargained with the poverty and ignorance of the fishermen in mind.

The poverty of some fishermen in Samfya District was due to a static mind set. This study has observed that the local people depended on fishing for their livelihood. It follows that in times of poor catches, their economic base was affected. For instance, many shops at Katanshya and Chinsanka became seasonal because of dependence on fish. Fishermen of Samfya District lacked knowledge of what was obtaining in other parts of the country which could have assisted them to change their mind set and perception of the fishing industry.

The colonial government introduced the Fish Conservation Ordinance of 1955 in order to control the fishing activities and restrict certain methods of fishing. Although their main interest in those fishing legislations was to create a revenue base for local authorities and to pay salaries to colonial government workers, the measures ensured sustainability of the fisheries and continuity of future fish production. Over-fishing was curtailed through the use of nets with acceptable

mesh sizes, especially during the fish breeding period, which caught fish of full grown sizes.

This study has also observed that the colonial government did not issue fishing licences to European commercial fishermen or European commercial traders to set up companies to buy fish in the Bangweulu area because they did not want the local African fishermen to be exploited or undermined. Besides exploitation, the colonial government was aware that increased fishing activities by European commercial fishermen would erode the fish stocks of the Bangweulu area because they used more advanced methods of fishing than the local African fishermen. Though the measures contributed to the poverty of the local fishermen by restricting the use of small meshed nets, the same measures kept the fishing population low which ensured continued supplies of fish on which the livelihood of the fishermen of Samfya District depended.

The government of Zambia also contributed to the poverty of some fishermen in Samfya District by not taking keen interest in the welfare of the fishery. The government did not help the fishermen of Samfya District with loans to purchase suitable fishing gear. In the absence of a suitable fishing gear fishermen depended on old fishing methods which only over exploited fish in low waters. The fish ban was an effective intervention as a fish conservation strategy but fishermen resisted it because, the government did not orient them on its necessity. Lack of a participatory approach in the enforcement of the fish ban raised suspicion among the fishing folk which consequently made them resist.

During the colonial period the government fixed the price of fish at the lakeside market and the Copperbelt markets which afforded the fishermen some profit on their fish. However the Zambian government relaxed the fish pricing system and left market forces to determine the prices. Fish traders found it expensive to buy fish at varying prices from different fishermen and devised a system of exchanging consumer goods with fish. The system of exchanging fish for certain consumer goods contributed to the poverty of the fishermen and consequently rural income diminished.

This study has further noted that the use of different fishing strategies and gear by the local fishermen was ideal for a multispecies fishery, such as the Bangweulu, in order to exploit different species of fish stocks in all their diversity. Using selective fishing methods exerted fishing pressure on certain species and disturbed the fish ecosystem. Using a mixture of fishing methods did not necessarily contribute to the depletion of fish stocks because fish population changed over time with or without fishing, due to individual behaviour, habitat and migration. But the increase in the number of fishermen reduced the fish catches per fisherman which later made it difficult for individual fishermen to make a living.

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