



FISH traders waiting to board a boat to go in search of fish at camps along the Barotse plains.

Sex for fish in fishing camps

CSOs take on scourge in Nalolo, Sesheke

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Nalolo

GENDER-BASED violence (GBV) is a common occurrence in the Zambian society, and is now morphing into a persistent issue in fishing communities, particularly in Western Province.

According to the 2018 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey, 36 percent of women have experienced physical violence since age 15 while 32 percent of married women have faced controlling behaviours from their husbands.

In 2021, the Zambia Police Service reported 20,540 GBV cases, with 79.4 percent of victims being female and 20.6 percent male.

Western Province recorded 1,701 cases, accounting for 9.7 percent of the national tally.

Despite the adoption of the Anti-Gender-Based Violence Act in 2021, GBV remains deeply rooted in gender inequality and is often tolerated, especially in rural areas.

The water sector is a breeding ground for GBV due to cultural and societal norms that have long dictated access and control of water-based resources.

Women are frequently sidelined and experience violent spurts of inequalities and harassment in the water sector.

To combat GBV in the fisheries sector, ActionAid Zambia and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) are implementing a project in Nalolo and Sesheke districts dubbed 'Resilient Inclusive Sustainable Environment' (RISE), supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

ActionAid RISE project manager Samantha Munang'andu says the project aims to mitigate and prevent GBV, improve access, benefits, control fisheries resources and contribute to environmental sustainability amid climate change.

"We have received many reports about women being abused at fishing camps and that those who want to buy good fish species have to agree to have sex with the fishermen or else they end up buying the bad type," Ms Munang'andu said at UCZ Muoyo congregation.

She disclosed that the project also aims to address the issue of illegal fishing methods.

"We want to discourage the use of illegal fishing gear because it poses significant challenges to Zambia's fisheries and sustainability and depletes the fish species," Ms Munang'andu said.

Some of the common illegal fishing methods include the use of insecticide-treated mosquito nets and poisonous substances.

Ms Munang'andu said addressing such issues can contribute to food security and support livelihoods in communities that rely on fishing for survival.

Nalolo District Commissioner Namatama Mupo also highlighted the prevalence of transactional sex in fishing camps, where fishermen often refuse to sell fish to women

unless they 'pay' sexually.

Ms Mupo said the difficulty in accessing good fish is what leads to women being exploited and abused.

"We need to collaborate with all stakeholders so that we find a way of helping these women that are found at fishing camps, otherwise what is on the ground is a sad reality," she noted.

Ms Mupo appealed to traditional leaders to also join the sensitisation team so that their subjects are well enlightened about the dangers of GBV.

"The Barotse Royal Establishment must also join this cause because it will carry more weight if it comes from them, especially since most indunas have control over the fishing camps," she said.

The district commissioner observed that most women come from Lusaka to buy fish in Western Province, and so when they consider the transport costs that they incur, some end up giving in to sex for fish.

The RISE project supports evidence-based strategies to address GBV in environmental and climate-related programming, promoting rights-based, gender-responsive, socially inclusive and equitable conservation. They also advocate for sustainable development amid climate change.

The organisation's call is on the Government to provide adequate GBV one-stop centres in all districts.

A participant, Pumulo Kamanga, who attended the launch of the project at Muoyo United Church of Zambia (UCZ), expressed gratitude for the sensitisation meeting, which raised awareness about GBV and its impacts.

Ms Kamanga emphasised the need to sensitise women who frequent fishing camps on different types of GBV and how to curb them.

"Many women are abused and, unfortunately, some don't even realise they are being abused, hence the need for sensitisation," she said.

A representative of Likuma GBV watch groups, Mwangala Mwangala, appealed to government departments to partner with her team in visiting fishing camps to sensitise people on GBV.

"We need to work together to capture as many people as possible and mitigate the effects of GBV," said Mr Mwangala.

A traditional leader, Induna Amaloti, identified alcohol abuse among men as a cause of GBV in most homes and fishing camps.

"Men drink excessively and end up beating their partners over small disputes," he said.

Induna Amaloti emphasised the district's need for GBV one-stop centres for easy reporting of GBV cases.

Ms Munang'andu agreed, stating that one-stop centres will easily assist victims in reporting cases.

"People often withdraw cases due to the challenges of moving from one office to another and you will find that others get discouraged and get back without reporting the cases," she said.

Ms Munang'andu added that one-stop centres will go a long way in fighting GBV because

victims of abuse will find all the services under one roof.

YWCA programme officer David Limbuwa pointed out that victim-blaming and fear of embarrassment are key reasons why people withdraw cases.

"Others are reluctant to share their experiences, so they prefer to withdraw the case rather than report it," said Mr Limbuwa.

YWCA wants government departments in Nalolo district to take advantage of their gatherings to come on board and talk about GBV issues.

"I know resources will not allow you to travel all the time, hence you can make use of other assignments so that you collaborate among yourselves and talk about these issues when you go out to carry out

other assignments," advised Mr Limbuwa.

He shared that YWCA has protective temporary shelters within the province where GBV victims are taken during their healing process.

"We ensure that GBV victims are separated from their abusers so we have safety shelters where we take them. It can be so disheartening to be in

the same room with someone who has abused you," he said.

GBV is a hindrance to the attainment of gender equality and the realisation of the social and economic goals of individuals, communities and the nation at large. The scourge erodes the confidence of the survivors, rendering them incapable of contributing to the development efforts of their

communities.

The goal of GBV campaigns in Zambia is to raise awareness, promote prevention and provide support for survivors. Ultimately this is expected to reduce GBV incidents, empower survivors and foster safer and equitable environments in communities such as finishing camps and society at large.

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