



Examining the Gendered Dynamics of Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea

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ABSTRACT

The maritime environment is typically male-dominated and women's inclusion into the sector remains a challenge. Maritime insecurity is impacting coastal societies around the Gulf of Guinea (GOG) in an unprecedented manner. Insecurities within the GOG maritime domain has diverse impacts on women, men, boys and girls, both directly and indirectly. However, discourse on these insecurities have over the years overlooked the gendered nuances. The role of women within these narratives have predominantly centered on the fisheries value chain and the need to address illegal fishing that affects their livelihoods. Reported statistics on maritime insecurities within this space largely fail to capture the gendered dynamics and in situations where these statistics are available, is rarely sex-disaggregated. Gender is central to both the problem and the solution. Given that maritime insecurity is not gender-blind, the response to addressing these insecurities must capture the interests of both men and women at all levels. Based on the existing evidence and emerging trends, this paper discusses the differentiated gendered impacts on outcomes across the three areas of endowments, economic security, and agency.

Keywords: Gender, Insecurity, Inclusion, Agency, Coastal Communities, Gulf of Guinea

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, nearly 80 percent of total trade is pursued through the maritime space.¹ The ocean has come to be appreciated as the 'main transport arteries for global trade'.² The process of interaction and integration among people, businesses, and governments worldwide is based on the free flow of goods and services, resources, capital and information. The maritime sector has long been established as the 'anchor' of global trade transporting everything from food production, packaged goods, clothing, beverages, automobiles, and electronics.³ Considering the strategic importance of the maritime zone to the very survival of individuals, states and international community, an act of instability and uncertainty is likely to grab headlines and attract public attention. The Gulf of Guinea waterway remains one of the most strategic and significantly important regions for the globe, considering its natural resource deposits and economic value.⁴ It also happens to be one of the most vulnerable maritime zones and security hotspots that has recently been tagged as the world's most dangerous sea trade route.⁵ The zone has had to contend with multiple threats, including piracy, drug smuggling, human trafficking, illegal and unregulated fishing, waste dumping and pollution, and threats to marine biosecurity.⁶

The insecurity displayed in many of these coastal countries has shown no respect for borders nor gender. One feature within the GoG maritime space that has received limited scholarly analysis and empirical assessment has been the disaggregated gendered impact of this insecurity within these coastal communities. It has been established that a number of women own fishing canoes and/or boats, and women normally finance fishing trips by providing money for fuel.⁷ Yet again, some women also pay for maintenance and repairs of boats and nets. These are roles that provide women with some influence

in the fisheries sector. This notwithstanding, it is estimated that only a paltry 2% of women make up the world seafarers' workforce.⁸ A situation that has curtailed an opportunity to comprehensively consider the experiences women in design, development, or implementation of maritime programmes and policies. The situation is even ominous considering the interconnected and transnational nature of many of these security challenges that have its origins and foothold from the land base. In the past, the maritime community was described in masculine forms and language.⁹ The maritime domain has always been a male-dominated industry and the same applies to the many associated jobs and the professions in the maritime community.¹⁰ However, such normative framing is no longer considered 'normal' in current maritime space, especially when you consider the existing structural, institutional and cultural values. It is not uncommon, nowadays, to be reminded that women throughout history have played significant roles in the maritime industry.¹¹ This article seeks to redress the imbalance by drawing on empirical examples of current uneven impact of the threat confronting some communities along the West African coast.

The interest of the impact of insecurity on women within the maritime space remains low. Gender inequality within the maritime sector is based on the many assumptions made about the roles, responsibilities and identities of men and women. These identities and norms stem from a complex combination of historical and traditional cultural attributes, ubiquitous work culture and societal barriers. Women's needs continue to play second fiddle to those of men who are seen as the catalyst in the industry.¹² The rigidity surrounding the desire to open the maritime domain to encompass the needs of both men and women have been linked to how masculine the entire space looks. Women security are continually hindered by exclusion, discrimination,

¹UNCTAD (2019). The Review of Maritime Transport 2018. United Nations.

²<https://www.oecd.org/ocean/topics/ocean-shipping/>

³Ibid.,

⁴UNCTAD (2020). The Review of Maritime Transport 2020. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/rmt2020_en.pdf

⁵The Economist Intelligence Unit (2021). Gulf of Guinea continues to be global piracy hotspot in 2020. <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1030651286>

⁶Jacobsen, K. L., Nordby, J. R., & Forsvarsakademiet (2015). Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. Copenhagen: Royal Danish Defence College Publishing House; ICC International Maritime Bureau, 'Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships', 2019 Annual Report, Maritime Piracy (London: ICC International Maritime Bureau, 14 January 2020), <https://www.icc-ccs.org/index.php/1286-unprecedented-number-of-crew-kidnappings-in-the-gulf-of-guinea-despite-drop-in-overall-global-numbers>

⁷Britwum, A. O. (2009). "The Gendered Dynamics of Production Relations in Ghanaian Coastal Fishing." *African Gender Institute* 1 (12): 69–85.

⁸International Transport Workers' Federation, Women seafarers: why are low numbers of women at sea a problem? www.itfseafarers.org/en/issues/women-seafarers.

⁹Cordingly, D. 2002. *Heroines & Harlots: Women at Sea in the Great Age of Sail*. London: Pan Books.

¹⁰Aggrey, H. A. (2000). *Women in the Maritime Industry: A review of female participation, and their role in Maritime Education and Training (MET) in the 21st Century*. MSc, World Maritime University.

¹¹Belcher, P. et al. 2003. *Women Seafarers: global employment policies and practices*. Geneva: International Labour Organization (ILO).

¹²Interview with a civil society actor, Dakar, 18 August, 2021

barriers and harassment that restrict their ability for their views and concerns to be heard. The fair recognition of the unbalanced impact of maritime insecurity, particularly on women, is the surest way of dealing expansively with the dynamics of these insecurity on both men and women. Widespread changes need to take place within communities along the coast to create conditions conducive for women's inclusion. The importance of safeguarding the legitimate uses of the oceans, lives of people at sea and security of coastal communities' present unique opportunities to shift the discourse of current state of affairs of the society and question power structures.

Notwithstanding the increasing availability of data on reported incidence of maritime insecurity in the GoG, data availability remains extremely patchy on the gendered impact and dynamics of these supposed insecurities. What is particularly lacking, so far, is a disaggregated data that allows mapping of the overall evolution and progress of these insecurities within the past two decades. This paper seeks to examine the gendered dimensions of the maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea by highlighting the roles of women and men as victims, actors, witnesses and peacebuilders. Additionally, the paper highlights how the maritime domain identify and analyze gendered maritime threats and the coherence and sustainability in dealing with those threats and challenges. The paper argues that weak institutions, poor governance, uneven distribution of wealth and lack of proper education are more indicative of the observation and experience of insecurity within the maritime space rather than gender. However, gender remains a determining factor in the nature of attacks and threats and the corresponding respond actions.

Defining the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Space

The Gulf of Guinea maritime space is one of the most diverse and complex regions within the Atlantic Ocean. Geographically, it is defined as the area of the Eastern Atlantic Ocean from 15°0'0" N to 15°0'0" S, and it encompasses 17 states from West and Central

Africa.¹³ The maritime domain spans about 6000 kilometers from Angola to Senegal and it includes countries such as Benin, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, São Tomé and Príncipe, The Gambia, and Togo. Cumulatively, these countries possess an expansive and thriving ecological, geographical, linguistic, cultural and historic diversity.¹⁵ From Anglophone to Francophone to Lusophone and hispanophone, the region, with a multi lingual divide, represent 25 percent of Africa's maritime traffic, with nearly 20 commercial seaports.¹⁶ The maritime domain of the GoG accounts for between 70-90 percent of the revenue generated in these states in the region.¹⁷ Due to its geostrategic location in the Atlantic Ocean, off the western African coast that links Africa to the Americas, Europe and Asia, the GoG domain serves as a crucial crossroad for international maritime trade traffic. This established trade route incidentally has become the passage for the movement of legal and illicit goods.

Besides the revenue windfall, the region is magnificently endowed with vast reserves of hydrocarbon, minerals, fisheries and arable forestry landscape making it one of the most viable strategic areas on the continent. Additionally, the region has gained more global attention and significance mainly as a result of it being the home to the largest volumes of the continents oil and gas, with an estimated source of 2.7% and 4.5% of the world's reserves respectively.¹⁸ The continuous giant discoveries and exploration of offshore hydrocarbon fields in the maritime waters has positioned the region as an attractive investment destination, source of global energy supply, food stock and raw materials for multinational companies. Currently, the region is responsible for nearly 60 percent of Africa's oil production while at the same time accounting for nearly 4 percent of global fish production.¹⁹ The ocean off the GoG is one of the world's richest fishing grounds and a critical source of employment for the mass of people within this enclave. In West Africa alone, up to a quarter of jobs are linked to the fisheries sub-sector.²⁰ The sea has become a place of significant importance increasing

¹³Joseph, E. D. (2021). *Maritime Security: Imperatives for Economic Development in the Gulf of Guinea*. Milton Keynes: AuthorHouse

¹⁴Ali, K.-D. (2015). *Publications on ocean development: Maritime security cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea*, Leiden: Brill; The International Crisis Group, "The Gulf of Guinea: The New Danger Zone," Africa Report No. 195, December 12, 2012.

¹⁵Ghosh, P. K. (2013). *Waiting to Explode: Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea*. Observer Research Foundation.

¹⁶Marcos, P. (2021). A Transatlantic Approach to Address Growing Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. The Center for Strategic and International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/transatlantic-approach-address-growing-maritime-insecurity-gulf-guinea>

¹⁷Ibid.,

¹⁸Hang, Z. and Seibel, K. (2015), 'Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea: A Greater Role for China?', The Jamestown Foundation 15, No. 1, pp.14–18.

¹⁹Marcos, P. (2021)

the interest of criminals wanting to use it as a theatre to conduct their crimes unrestrained. This primary and strategic position of the GoG in the socio-economic survival and development of countries along its coast critically underscores the huge importance of its general security, which in recent years has been devastated by many security challenges from pirates to smugglers, migrants to hackers, stolen fish to smuggled drugs.²¹ The context of state fragility, weak governance and law enforcement and underdevelopment has created tension among the GoG countries. These tensions have led to violence and criminality.²² The violence in the region has been particularly concentrated in the Niger Delta region, the Basassi Peninsular and the West African Coast.

Gendered Dimensions of the Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea: An Overview

Maritime insecurity in the GoG is not a new phenomenon. There have been several instances of crimes such as pollution, illegal fishing, human and drug trafficking in the past. Besides, GoG, for instance, has its own historical evolution of sea raids and pirate attacks which did not constitute a major threat until the nature and scope of recent attacks changed in the last 25 years. Hitherto the regular attacks of passing boats on ad-hoc basis has given way to a more pronounced, sophisticated, organized, gendered and extremely violent incidences. The discussion in this section will therefore focus on three of these crimes namely piracy and armed robbery at sea, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) and human trafficking.

Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea

Piracy and armed robbery at sea in the GoG is characterized by a complex web of factors, dynamics and manifestations. The consideration of these factors and dynamics are located within the context of historical, governmental and contemporary development challenges. As was highlighted by an interlocutor in Abidjan:

When a pirate goes on a vessel it is to steal money, goods and property belonging to

seafarers on board. If someone goes on a vessel to kill people that person is not a pirate but a terrorist...A pirate can kill accidentally but not intentionally. Piracy and armed robbery at sea has a big impact on the maritime domain considering how important the sea is to GoG countries.

From the days of politically motivated militant groups staging attacks against oil and gas infrastructure to current criminal assemblages kidnapping foreign crewmembers for ransom deep off the West African coast, piracy and maritime criminality has become elusive to regional and continental efforts. There has been a steep rise in the number of incidents and attacks have continued to soar over the last decade.²³ The region remains one of the world's piracy hotspots with Nigeria renowned as the epicenter of piracy in the coast of West Africa. With more than 130 sailors (mostly men) taken in 2020 alone the increased success rate and violence has arguably made the GoG area the most dangerous coast in recent times, more than the Somali coast.²⁴ Even through the scale of acts of piracy and maritime criminality generally vary occasionally, often in response to states' actions and the behaviour of the industry partners, the nature of recent piratical acts in the region continues to pose an existential threat to trade safety, security of crew and the shipping industry. Especially considering that the economies of the GoG countries are open and dependent on imports and exports through the sea.²⁵

Pirate and maritime criminal groups are distinctive in their formation and movements and may not be equally treated as the same in terms of responding to the threats that they pose. There are mainly three categories of pirates operating in the coastal areas of the GoG. There are the deep offshore pirates who operate far from the coast of West Africa and are specialized in targeting mostly international shipping traffic. They are more adventurous and courageous men who use sophisticated means of attacking these ships and taking many hostages. The group that bears this categorization initially emerged from Nigeria and mainly operated within the Nigerian waters. But in recent times groups that operate in such manner have become more audacious spreading their attacks to Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire. Anecdotal suggestion indicates that the groups that

²⁰Interview with Maritime Security Expert, Maritime University, Accra 14 September 2021

²¹Otto, L. (2020). *Global challenges in maritime security: An introduction*. Cham: Springer

²²Lopez-Lucia, E. (2015) 'Fragility, Violence and Criminality in the Gulf of Guinea', Rapid Literature Review. UK: GSDRC, www.gsdr.org

²³The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) latest global piracy report records 38 incidents since the start of 2021 – compared with 47 incidents during the same period last year. In the first three months of 2021, the IMB Piracy Reporting Centre (PRC) reported 33 vessels boarded, two attempted attacks, two vessels fired upon, and one vessel hijacked.

²⁴Ibid.,

²⁵Interview with a Maritime Official, Lagos, 7 September 2021

operate in this manner are regional in scope with a single leadership mostly in Nigeria.

Described as the low-reach and coastal pirates, the second category of pirates in the GoG operates 40nm from the shore with their primary targets being the local vessels along a country's maritime space. Their targets often include fishing vessels, oil and gas support vessels, cargo vessels and tankers engaged in cabotage operations. Operationally, this group typically functions well and close to their hideaways or bases onshore and have limited operational capabilities as compared to the deep offshore pirates. Their methods of operations include kidnapping for ransom, racketeering and looting. Their attention is more on local crew than on foreign seafarers.

The third category of pirates who are basically riverine criminals operate in the waterways deep within the Niger Delta, where they target local passenger vessels, as well as engage in other crimes. These groups are been known to pose immediate existential threat to local populations in the creeks of the Niger Delta region than to international vessels and their crews. In most cases their activities are centered around illegal oil bunkering. Most experiences have shown that greater number of the actors engaged in these piratical activities are men even though we also have women pirates.²⁶ Although there were some similarities between the roles and responsibilities of men and women engaged in activities of piracy in the GoG, the latter was purely an ancillary or support roles. Men are mostly undertaking leadership roles such as supervising initial attacks on vessels; providing the financial backing for the attacks and negotiating for the release of hostages following a successful kidnapping operation. There are also specialized teams that mostly compose of men that possess particular skillsets on navigation and engineering that become very useful to pirates, particularly when it comes to hang grappling ladders on vessels. Whereas some of the interviewees stated categorically that there were women pirates who perform the same roles as the men by climbing these vessels to steal, others were of the view that the evidence available suggest that women perform support roles and camp guard duties, sometimes providing security and care for hostages of a successful kidnapping operation. As was stated by one local interlocutor:

...if you came to the coastal villages, women provide the hiding spaces for the male pirates together with other criminals like drug traffickers...

Because the pirates are sharing their booty from the vessels with the community sometimes women front and pretend that they do not know or are unaware of what is happening.

This only comes to reemphasize the projected traditional narrative that seafaring activity is one that requires muscles and strength to operate effectively. It is depicted as a 'man's job or male resort', that needs manpower due to its sometimes-ruthless nature of attacks and use of weapons and ammunitions. Due to the nature of its operational mechanics, women are most often relegated from its offshore activities. This demonstrates the traditional masculine portrayal of men as strong and tough in such seafaring activities. Historically, women are generally not expected to be at sea due to the assumption that they are soft, weak and not in a position to physically endure the brutalities at sea. "The idea that women tend to be emotional and cry promotes a negative image about women's capacity to work at sea" (Kitada, 2013).

But the process is not entirely devoid of women's roles and its negative impact on them. Piracy requires structures and networks to function effectively. This is where women often come in handy. Emerging trends indicate that pirates' resort to the use of women as spies offshore, who gather confidential information on targeted ships. Such women tagged as "delicate and delicate" infiltrate the crews of target ships and leak information on cargo routes, arrivals and departures²⁷. As was indicated by an interviewee:

Sometimes women go on the vessel to sell goods such as fruits, vegetables, salt among others. At the same time, they engage in spying and when they return to the communities they could inform the male pirates that this ship has very important persons (VVIPs) or that there are valuables on board... also they could inform the would-be pirates that there are guns on board the ship so they should not engage or only attempt when they are well armed themselves.

Women and girls serve as cooks, care-givers for hostages, and in some cases, are victims. Some also play the roles of relationship facilitators, resource dealers, care givers and financial investors to pirates. Where there are female crew aboard a hijacked vessel, they face the risk of sexual assault or violation. Piracy networks are sometimes composed of children and young, unemployed adults who fall victim to criminal networks²⁸ when they are enticed with promises of

²⁶Interview with a Maritime Official, Dakar, 25 August 2021

²⁷https://marine-digital.com/article_pirates

riches, weapons, wives and luxurious standards of living.

According to the IMO (2019), piracy victims have been predominantly males. And in such instances, women take up the roles of providers/ breadwinners for the family. Unfortunately, there is lack of sex-disaggregated data on perpetrators and victims of piracy in the GoG, as well as impact of the gendered dimensions on women, to help draw clear assessment of the insecurities in the maritime domain.

Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUU)

Closely associated with the challenges of piracy and armed robbery at sea is the phenomenon of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing or “pirate fishing”. IUU has become a major threat to marine ecosystem because of the substantial decline in commercially viable fish population within the West African Coast. It has been estimated that IUU fishing accounts for about 20% of world catches representing a global loss of between US\$10 billion and \$23.5 annually. West Africa’s maritime waters is one of the domains estimated to have highest levels of pirate fishing in the world.²⁹ Countries along this stretch lose \$1.3 billion annually and 37% of their annual catch to pirate fishing.³⁰ Illegal fishing depletes fish stock, collapses legal fishing structures, disrupts trade and the fishing supply chain especially at the community level along the coast. This adversely compromises food security and the livelihoods of small-scale fisher folk in coastal communities, some of whom are the world’s poorest people. Small-scale fishing sector accounts for food and economic security for especially coastal populations. It forms their main source of livelihoods and income. In countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Gambia, the fisheries sector provides more than 45% of animal protein. Illegal fishing especially inshore, in areas reserved for locals therefore displaces artisanal fishers and exerts undue pressure on their source of livelihood.

Though the fisheries production point is dominated by men (boat ownership and actual fishing), it is women who play roles of brokers, processors and traders at the landing sites. The main role that women play in the maritime space is in the fisheries sub-sector, basically artisanal fisheries. Specifically, these prominent roles are mainly in post-harvest

(post-catch) and processing jobs because these are jobs that are considered to be less strenuous and women do not need a lot of support to manage these kinds of activities. They sell the catch across countries, to augment the protein needs of people. In the retail markets, fish trading is the specialized trade of some women, who sell their consignments from the landing sites. Some women also specialize as brokers in the value chain. Over 70% of women in the sector play intermediary roles by brokering deals on harvested fish between fishers and processors/traders.³¹ Women dominate in all methods of fish processing (drying, frying and smoking). The fisheries sector is the mainstay and source of livelihood of most women engaged in the sector. In addition to these roles, women devote their efforts to the extra responsibility of household duties and childcare, through their engagement in the fisheries sector. This means the lives of millions of people, especially women and children, are more vulnerable to poverty and malnutrition, when illegal fishing thrives. Through the work of women as fish processors and traders, jobs and affordable animal protein is provided to many. Unfortunately, activities of illegal fishers immensely affect artisanal small-scale fisher folk who rely on it. This leads to revenue losses for small-scale fishers in coastal communities and, consequently, to economic stagnation and impoverishment in coastal communities.

Besides, there are no social, cultural or legal prohibitions towards women participation in the fisheries industry. The barriers to women unrestricted access to this sector is associated with the risk activities involved and the long days of shift on high seas. As was stated by an interlocutor:

In Cote d’Ivoire, women are active in the activities of ship chandler(s). They provide food, spare parts, oil, salt, ice and petrol to vessels when they dock...However if women have to go to sea and stay for longer periods their children, home, family and the marriage is likely to suffer.

However, the study also established from anecdotal evidence that some communities in Nigeria, Benin and Togo have women fishers who actually go to sea. Females account for 2% of the world’s 1.2 million seafarers and the Food & Agriculture Organization, FAO (2016) reports that women represented 19% of all persons directly engaged in fisheries and

²⁸UN SRSR Report of 2012

²⁹Environmental Justice Foundation (2012). *Pirate Fishing Exposed: The Fight Against Illegal Fishing in West Africa and the EU*. <https://ejfoundation.org/resources/downloads/Pirate-Fishing-Exposed.pdf>

³⁰Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (2015). *Illicit Migration to Europe: Consequences of Illegal Fishing and Overfishing in West Africa*. <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/illlicit-migration-to-europe-consequences-of-illegal-fishing-and-overfishing-in-west-africa/>

³¹Chikondi L. Manyungwa-Pasani (2017). *Women’s Participation in Fish Value Chains and Value Chain Governance in Malawi: A Case of Msaka (Lake Malawi) and Kachulu (Lake Chilwa)*. <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/womens-participation-fish-value-chains-and-value-chain-governance-malawi-case-msaka-lake-malawi-and-kachulu-lake-chilwa/>

aquaculture.

Illegal fishing disproportionately affects women who constitute the majority of labour force in the fisheries value chain in the Gulf of Guinea. For many women in this value chain, a situation of illegal fishing, coupled with the distress of reduced revenue from fisheries supply and food insecurity, leads to heightened “vulnerability”, unemployment, poverty, loss of livelihood and malnutrition. Through incomes generated from this sector, women provide the much-needed food for their families and the community at large. Illegal fishing destabilizes local food production, puts economic hardship on coastal communities and exposes women to economic insecurities.³² It is therefore plausible to say that when illegal fishing thrives, especially in onshore areas preserved for artisanal fishing communities, more women and children become greatly affected.

Human Trafficking

Across the globe, children make up almost 20% of all human trafficking victims. West Africa has gained notoriety for trafficking of children for forced labour. In the sub-region, three out of four victims of human trafficking are children. Following trafficking statistics between 2016 and 2019, out of 4799 victims detected in Sub-Saharan Africa, West Africa recorded 2553 children trafficked³³. The Director-General of the National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim flags Nigeria as “an origin, transit and destination country” for trafficking³⁴. François Louncény, Special Representative to the UN Secretary-General and Head of the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) bemoans the often-neglected human cost of offshore organized crimes. He expresses concern about rising cases of migration at sea and human trafficking which disproportionately affects women and children. Both men and women are trafficked but the act is primarily targeted at women and children.

Children and girls are trafficked into boats crossing the Gulf and forced into modern day slavery. Some are trafficked to European countries and the Middle East and forced into prostitution, farm hands on

plantations or domestic work. Trafficked women and children have a high vulnerability to sexual exploitation. A disproportionate number of women participate in this illegal business not as victims, but perpetrators of the act. Women traffickers are particularly active in the recruitment phase of human trafficking³⁵. They operate by winning trust of victims usually mothers, children and girls. Women traffickers serve as conduits for moving victims into destinations of exploitation. In other instances, women traffickers are partners in the chain and serve as caregivers for victims in transit. 35% of children in West Africa trafficked for sexual exploitation have a parent organizing their exploitation³⁶. The West African sub region also recorded the highest number of females investigated/arrested, prosecuted and/or convicted of trafficking.³⁷ Offshore trafficking for forced labour in Africa is widely documented³⁸.

Insecurities and the Politics of Exclusion

Since the passage of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) in 2000, the global community has made progress in incorporating women’s agency, voice and capacity in policy discourse on international peace and security. The resolution underscores the meaningful participation of women in decision making in all matters of international security and peace at all levels. This includes areas of peacebuilding, conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution. However, a lot more needs to be done especially in spaces such as the maritime industry, where traditionally, issues have been considered gender neutral. Actors within the Gulf of Guinea maritime space have until recently been gender-blind. Issues of gender have rarely been incorporated in maritime security discourse within this domain, partly due to the general consideration of the subject as “hardcore” security matters. This has led to under representation and inclusion of women in this field as well as the significant roles they can play, in curtailing threats within the Gulf of Guinea maritime space. Understanding the role of women as equal actors in addressing insecurities within the GoG blue economy is critical to tackling the security threats and demands the recognition

³²https://www.unodc.org/documents/Gender/Thematic_Gender_Briefs_English/Org_crime_and_trafficking_brief_23_03_2020.pdf

³³UNODC (2020). Global Report on Trafficking in Persons. https://www.unodc.org/nigeria/en/human-trafficking-in-west-africa_three-out-of-four-victims-are-children-says-unodc-report.html

³⁴Ibid

³⁵See pages 27-29 of UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2014 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.14.V.10). See page 36-39 of the UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2016 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.16.IV.6).

³⁶Hounmenou, C.E. (2019) Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Children in the West Africa region, in Handbook of Human Trafficking and Modern-Day Slavery by Jennifer Bryson Clark and Sasha Poucki (Editors), Publisher: Sage Publishing, pp.371, 2019

³⁷See page 166 of UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020.

³⁸Environmental Justice Foundation (2012). Pirate Fishing Exposed: The Fight against Illegal Fishing in West Africa and the EU EJF, London, 2012 https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/journal.pone_0246835.pdf

that maritime insecurities are not gender-neutral.

Increasing the meaningful participation of women in the maritime zone is both the right thing to do and the smart thing to do. Equal and inclusive participation of all citizenry in private and public life is essential and fundamental to the stability of a just society. Cultivating gender equality in dealing with all the maritime challenges is a critical goal in itself. There should be an absence of discrimination on the basis of a person's sex in dealing with the many varied maritime issues especially those that have to deal with roles, responsibilities, threats and the skillset to counter the increasingly complex and multidimensional operational issues in the maritime space. Substantial evidence exists pointing to the exclusion of women from decision-making within the maritime industry. Thus, improving opportunities for previously marginalized groups such as women to participate in ensuring a safe and secured maritime space would be the most ideal conflict-prevention mechanism. Sophisticated raids and attacks on the high seas are compounded by on-land challenges such as poverty, corruption, poor governance, sea blindness and lack of capacity and effective control mechanisms by member states along this coastal region. These governance, legislative and capacity limitations drive insecurities in the domain and makes the 'blue economy' a target for increased interest of transnational organized crime groups. Given the interconnected and transnational nature of these drivers of instability in the maritime space, solutions will require a diverse approach that incorporate the needs and effective coordination among all genders as well as the regional bodies concerned.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to broaden and contextualize the gendered impact of maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. The region is undoubtedly emerging as an important element of the global economy. The consistent discoveries of natural resources particularly oil and gas and the changes in geopolitical parameters remain the main advantages of the region. Various interviewees pointed to the challenge confronting the Gulf of Guinea and highlighted how the gendered outlay is often overlooked. However, the regions enormous potential is being threatened by crimes such as piracy, drug smuggling, human trafficking, illegal and unregulated fishing, waste dumping and pollution, and threats to marine biosecurity. The insecurity displayed in many of these coastal countries has shown no respect for borders nor gender. However,

the enormous potential of the region has been challenged by ongoing demographic changes, unreasonable policy choices, weak institutions, as well as persistent exposure to adverse factors such as the insecurity on land.

Based on interviews, data collection and a literature review this study has provided an analysis of the gendered patterns of engagement in the maritime space and identified barriers and opportunities for greater gender diversity in the maritime domain. All the interviewees agreed that the maritime zone would be strengthened by the inclusion of women and the needs in tackling comprehensively the challenges confronting the space. Gender diversity is essential to cultivating ideas and perspectives that ensure maritime policies and practices adequately respond to the different needs of all groups affected by the insecurities in the GoG. However, as this study has showed, women tend to experience institutional obstacles that hinder them from enjoying the same opportunities as men in this space. Understanding the roles and functions that women play in the maritime space is vital to addressing their impact of these insecurities on their livelihoods and wellbeing.

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About the Project

The three-year project on “Enhancing Regional Research, Capacity Building and Convening of Stakeholders towards a Safer Maritime Domain in the Gulf of Guinea”, covers the coastal countries in West and Central Africa and is being implemented through three key approaches: research, dialogue and capacity building. The project is primarily aimed at promoting a safer maritime security domain in the Gulf of Guinea. Knowledge-based products highlighting key maritime security issues are part of the research outputs in an effort to raise awareness at a policy, technical and operational level. Overall, the project recognizes that piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea continue to be significant threats not only to the economies of Guinea countries, but also regional and international shipping, necessitating a harmonized regional response to counter these threats.



