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Interpreting Perceptions about Coastal Fisheries in Sierra Leone: Scapegoats and Panaceas

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Abstract: This paper analyses the myriad perceptions about coastal fisheries in Sierra Leone expressed by respondents in 66 interviews conducted in 2017 and 2020 during two periods of fieldwork in two coastal communities (Tombo and Goderich). Most of these perceptions focused on the respondents' explanations for the dire state of the coastal fisheries, and often these explanations sought 'scapegoats' to blame. Our findings are that the main 'scapegoats' were foreigners, industrial trawlers, artisanal fishers, fishers' unions and the government. Other interpretations focused on the respondents' recommendations for restoring the health of the coastal fisheries, and our findings here are that the main 'panaceas' were coercion, sensitisation, and co-management. In discussing these findings, we came to the conclusion that both the identification of scapegoats and the search for panaceas were unhelpful ways of understanding and alleviating the problems facing Sierra Leone's coastal fisheries because they polarised and over-simplified the issues, sowing divisions between the stakeholders, thereby reinforcing and prolonging the crisis. A more fruitful approach is to look for ways of forging links and establishing partnerships between the disparate players, especially between the government and community organisations.



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1. Introduction

The coastal fisheries in Sierra Leone are immensely important to the welfare of many thousands of inhabitants [1,2]. However, the stocks have deteriorated in recent years to the extent that several important species are in danger of collapse [3–5]. Many commentators attribute the deterioration to overfishing but there is considerable controversy over both the causes of overfishing and the remedies required to end it. This study sought to examine the controversy from the inside, investigating the perceptions held by the people themselves who are engaged in the fisheries, including fishers, administrators, and community leaders. Extensive fieldwork was carried out in two of the largest coastal fisheries communities in Sierra Leone—Tombo and Goderich—during 2018 and 2020, when over 200 interviews were conducted, 66 of which were selected for analysis. These 66 interviewees provided many different perceptions about the deteriorating condition of the coastal fisheries, focusing particularly on the causes of the decline and on possible measures to arrest it. The causes were often framed in terms of 'scapegoats'—i.e., people assumed to be responsible for the falling fish stocks. The proposed remedial measures were often framed in terms of 'panaceas'—i.e., policies that would come to the rescue of the stocks. In our examination of the transcripts, we analysed these framings of 'scapegoats' and 'panaceas', discussed their limitations, and noted how some respondents sought to replace scapegoating and panacea-searching with healing and toleration.

Section 2 outlines the theoretical framework that informs the paper. Section 3 explains the methods used in this research. Section 4 reports the results of the study, dividing the findings into two parts: respondents' perceptions of 'scapegoats' and of 'panaceas'.

Section 5 discusses the results in light of the theoretical framework. Section 6 concludes the paper by summarising its implications for fisheries policy in Sierra Leone.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that informs this paper is two-fold: scapegoat theory and panacea theory.

2.1. Scapegoat Theory

The term ‘scapegoat’ originated in the Book of Leviticus which describes a goat being sent out into the desert bearing the sins of the community which it carried away from the people who committed them [6]. There are two different ways of categorising scapegoat theory, though there is some overlap between them. First, there is a distinction between individual scapegoating and collective scapegoating. Second, there is a distinction between rational and irrational scapegoating. Individual scapegoating occurs when an individual blames another person for the anguish s/he/ is experiencing. Finlay et al. [7] uses the terms ‘projection’ and ‘displacement’ to explain individual scapegoating; scapegoaters project on to the scapegoat disagreeable characteristics they see in themselves; and they displace their frustration at dealing with anguish into aggression against the scapegoat, thereby cathartically relieving themselves of their psychic tension [8,9]. Individual scapegoating is thus a self-purification process [10,11]. Collective scapegoating serves a communal purpose—in-group preservation [7,10]. Crossman [6] notes that collective scapegoating often takes place when societies are suffering severe economic hardships or loss of natural resources, and one group of people blames another group of people for the crisis they are experiencing. It is a familiar strategy of protagonists faced with a crisis to look for someone else to blame for their hardship [12]. The urge to cover up the responsibility of the ruling group may precipitate scapegoating [10]. Girard [13] describes it as a ‘persecution myth’ and an act of ‘symbolic violence’. Douglas [10] says ignorance of the real cause of a crisis is often the spark for scapegoating.

Following Girard [13,14] identifies four stages of collective scapegoating: (1) a crisis occurs in a community; (2) people look for an explanation for the crisis; (3) the search focuses on groups who are ‘outsiders’ or minorities, fringe members of the society, because they are readily visible as different or apart—the ‘other’—and therefore more plausibly perceived to be guilty of doing harm to the society that does not welcome them; and (4) hostility to this targeted group may end in banishment, violence or even extermination in order to remove the canker from society and restore harmony and prosperity.

Finlay et al. [7] say scapegoats are created by society to heal its own divisions and restore the unity of the in-group. The scapegoat myth serves to restore a sense of group identity in times of stress [9] (p. 179). Denike [15] (p. 113) reports Girard’s theory that scapegoats are selected in order to expiate or quell or manage the inherent impulses to conflict and disorder that exist within all societies. The victims on whom the in-group projects the causes of society’s problems must be too weak to retaliate [15]. Mellema [16] says a group may be scapegoated for something they did not do, or even for something that never happened at all, but usually, the event did occur, and the scapegoated group did play some part in it, even if their part may be greatly exaggerated by the scapegoater and they are blamed disproportionately for the harm to which they may have contributed only a marginal amount. Finlay et al. [7] says the distinguishing characteristic of the scapegoated person or group can be anything that differentiates them from the in-group—including ethnicity, religion, language, nationality, ideology, age, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, disability, education, and power. Cabrejas [17] (p. 422) likens this process to “hygienic/purification rituals, where “filth” is stigmatised and removed to re-order the environment”—ethnic cleansing [9]—and we can find endless examples of such scapegoating, including of Jews, Muslims, blacks, witches, gypsies, HIV sufferers and greens. Finlay et al. [7] add McCarthyism’s scapegoating of communists in the USA, and notes that targeted groups are stigmatised as demons, criminals, subversives, terrorists,

deviants and traitors [13]. Gibson and Howard [18] note that many political leaders have successfully deflected their own responsibility for failures by blaming target groups, and sometimes a group (often the Jews) is repeatedly blamed to the point that a permanent assumption is created that whatever problems occur in a society must be caused by this group's malign presence and activity.

Scapegoating of one group by another is ubiquitous—"the entire universe swarms with scapegoats" [13] (p. 41)—and there are endless examples of it [17]. As Crossman [6] points out, it has occurred throughout history and continues today [10]. Girard argues it is an innate and primordial means of generating consensus and maintaining social order [17]. Douglas [10] (p. 108) claims scapegoating has become so common that it "must therefore be accepted as an essential ingredient of social behaviour". Moreover, it appears to be increasing as a result of the development of social media and the rise of populism and authoritarianism in political systems across the globe.

Turning to the second categorisation of scapegoating—irrational and rational scapegoating—Douglas [10] says scapegoating has both irrational/hidden elements and rational/deliberate elements, each of which may be evident in a given scapegoating act. The irrational element arises out of frustration, and may take the form of lashing out in blind rage against a convenient target who may have played no part in the factors which led to the scapegoater's frustration. Douglas, like Finlay et al., uses the psychological concepts of projection and displacement to explain this form of scapegoating behaviour. The rational element arises out of cold-blooded calculation of some advantage to be gained by scapegoating a person or group. For example, a government party might deflect the responsibility for a bad policy choice by blaming someone else, and such a deliberate move might save the government party from electoral defeat.

Scapegoating may be justified for helping to maintain a community—victimisation of some of its parts is a price worth paying to save the whole from possible disintegration. Or it may be justified as a means of buying time to conduct an inquiry into the real cause(s) of the crisis. However, there are five main criticisms of scapegoating. (1) It is almost always factually incorrect in identifying scapegoats as sole causes of a social crisis [12]. (2) It is always morally unjust to blame groups for problems they may have no responsibility for, or if they are partly responsible, to visit the entire blame upon them [16]. (3) It is usually ineffective because it deflects attention from the real cause of the crisis and therefore does not solve the problem in the long-term [10]. (4) Scapegoaters rarely use the time bought to examine and deal with the real causes, but normalise the practice, so it becomes more important for them to look for scapegoats than for real causes [19]. (5) Scapegoats might retaliate against their tormentors and set up a spiral of vengeance and counter-vengeance [15].

2.2. Panacea Theory

It is a familiar strategy of people suffering from severe threats to their livelihoods to look for immediate solutions or 'panaceas' to end their misery. The term 'panacea' originated in Ancient Greek mythology with Panakeia, the goddess of universal remedy, who was deemed capable of curing any disease or malady, and it expressed the notion of an all-purpose medical antidote or elixir for eternal life. The word *pan* in Greek means 'all', and the word *akēs* in Greek means 'aches', so the word 'panacea' means a cure for all aches. Quasi-medical usage of the term persists today in dietary advice: for example, both aspirin and ginseng are widely recommended for warding off a multitude of bodily disorders. However, the term is now more often used socially rather than medically, to mean any measure which people believe will solve the problems caused by the specific crisis facing them. It is linked to terms like 'silver bullet', 'magic bullet', and 'magic wand', which convey the message that there is a single solution for turning things around [19,20].

Panaceas are often linked to ideologies which purport to have uncovered the key to economic development: right wing ideologies see the market as the panacea [21]; left-wing ideologies see equality as the panacea [22]. Other candidate social, scientific, economic and

political panaceas include poverty relief [23]; universal access to education [24–26]; social enterprises [27–29] inter-group contact [30]; scientific expertise [31]; entrepreneurship [32]; collaborative innovation [33]; privatisation [34]; public-private partnerships [35]; corporate social responsibility [36]; integrated coastal zone management [37]; performance management [38]; leadership [39,40] stakeholder participation [41–43]); co-management [44]; voting [45]; trust in government [46]; and strong law enforcement [39].

Applying panacea theory to fisheries management, Young et al. [47] (p. 9065) identify three factors that foster panaceas—conceptual narratives, power disconnects, and heuristic biases. Conceptual narratives “make easy answers like panaceas seem plausible”; power disconnects create “vested interests in panaceas”; and heuristic biases “prevent people from accurately assessing panaceas”. Young et al. [47] have individual transferable quotas (ITQs) in their sights as a panacea that has been championed across the world as applicable to all fisheries but which they say is only appropriate in particular circumstances. The conceptual narrative for ITQs is neo-liberalism or the superiority of the market; the power disconnect for ITQs is the fact that ITQs create winners (elite vessel owners) and losers (small-scale fishers) with a permanent power imbalance between them; and the heuristic bias for ITQs is the extrapolation from the true premise that ITQs have been seen to work in some circumstances to the false conclusion that they will work everywhere. Young et al. [47] also refer to ‘confirmation bias’, which ensures that people discount data that challenge their beliefs and absorb data that confirm them, irrespective of the veracity of those data. Groupthink and group polarisation occur when confirmation bias takes hold of communities.

Degnbol et al. [48] characterise panaceas in fisheries management as ‘technical fixes’ arising out of the narrow ‘tunnel vision’ mentality of people stuck in their closed disciplinary silos. For example, ITQs are typically advocated by economists; marine protected areas (MPAs) by ecologists; and community-based management (CBM) by social anthropologists: “technical solutions fall into the category of ‘fixes’ when they are used as wholesale solutions to specialised problems” [48] (p. 534).

The concept of the panacea has acquired a pejorative connotation for being simplistic, naïvely assuming that ‘one size fits all’, failing to take into account the complexities of social, economic and environmental problems. Many sceptics disparage the term as a myth, a false promise of something that is too good to be true, misleading people into making decisions that are myopic and even dangerous and evil, quick fixes—a fool’s paradise. Meinzen-Dick [49] (p. 15203) describes panaceas as “paper tigers”—i.e., solutions “that exist on paper only”. Ostrom et al. [20] (p. 15176) say “panacea proneness is a diluted form of fundamentalism rather than a method of serious diagnosis” [50]. Fixes are simplistic solutions to complex problems, and they invariably fail: “The track record of the use of panaceas is one of repeated failures” [20] (p. 15176). The most notorious example in modern history of a failed conspiratorial panacea is, of course, the Nazi notion of the ‘final solution’ of the elimination of the Jewish people.

Nevertheless, panaceas are still popular. Whittle [51] (pp. 173,180,183,187), referring to “management panaceas” as a “quick fix”, and to “panacea fundamentalism” and “panacea authoritarianism”, claims that the view of managers as “panacea dopes, blindly following fashions, consuming the latest guru fad and regurgitating it in their organizations, is still strong in the literature”, reflecting the fact that “the term ‘panacea’ has a paradigmatic quality”. Ackoff [52] (p. 43) says “managers suffer from panacea overload . . . management seems to be confronted with more panaceas than problems”. Gendreau and Listwan [53] (p. 35) refer to “episodes of ‘panaceaphilia’ in the present US prison system.

Young et al. [47] point out that almost any single solution can degenerate into a panacea, and they say we need to grapple with the panacea mind-set if we are to combat widespread simplisticism. According to Degnbol et al., the antidote to technical fixes is cross-disciplinary research: in other words, we must accept complexity. Paradoxically, however, complexity itself has been interpreted as a panacea [54], while another anti-

dote to panacea thinking—Lindblom’s idea of muddling through—has also been as itself a panacea [55].

2.3. Relation between Scapegoat Theory and Panacea Theory

There is an obvious link between scapegoating and panaceas in that scapegoating may be seen as a panacea if it removes a threat to a society. Another connection is that both may be viewed as illusory chimeras. A third link, according to Girard [13] (p. 44), is their sequentiality, in that one may follow the other: “The universal execration of the person who causes the sickness is replaced by universal veneration for the person who cures that same sickness” (p. 44). Webster [18] (p. 10) sees them as complementary, in that they commonly go together: “decision makers choose to accept credit for the positive consequences of the silver bullet solutions that they implement, while blaming negative side effects on scapegoats”. Young et al. [47] (p. 9068) also suggest they are complementary: “those in power frequently rationalize the external costs of panaceas by blaming scapegoats”. For example, “elites with vested interests in ITQs rationalize negative side effects imposed on others” by saying the others’ inefficiencies are to blame for their failure to benefit from ITQs.

3. Methods of Obtaining Data

The main method of obtaining data for this paper was interviewing. There was a total of over 200 interviews carried out face-to-face with residents in two coastal fishing communities in Sierra Leone—Tombo and Goderich—during two periods of fieldwork in 2017 and 2020. We selected Tombo and Goderich because they are the biggest fishing communities in Sierra Leone in terms of vessels and numbers of fishers [56]. To encourage heterogeneity and obtain a variety of perspectives, a wide range of respondents were recruited by researchers who spent a considerable amount of time finding people with different views. However, only 66 interviewees expressed views that were relevant to scapegoating and/or panaceaing, so we selected these for analysis—33 from Tombo and 33 from Goderich. Nevertheless, our aim to get a wide range of opinions expressed by respondents from a variety of groups was achieved by the 66 transcripts, which came from interviews with 46 fishers, 2 councillors, 3 women fish mongers, 5 staff from the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, 5 staff from the Sierra Leone Artisanal Fishers Union (SLAFU), 4 academics, and 1 NGO representative. Of the 66 interview transcripts, 51 came from the 2017 cohort, and 15 from the 2020 cohort. This imbalance is partly because there were fewer interviews carried out in 2020 than in 2017, and partly because the 2017 respondents were more expansive in expressing their views than were their counterparts in 2020 (probably because they were asked semi-structured questions rather than the structured questions which 2020 respondents were asked). The reason we conducted two rounds of interviews was to check in 2020 whether there had been any change since 2017; we found there were no significant differences between the views expressed in 2017 and in 2020. A standard set of questions was asked both cohorts, but in a semi-structured format in 2017 and in a structured format in 2020. There was little difference between the perceptions expressed by residents in Tombo and Goderich. The interviews were carried out on a one-to-one basis outside the earshot of anyone else.

4. Results

The most important data contained in the interview transcripts were respondents’ perceptions of (1) causes of the coastal fisheries crisis; and (2) remedies for overcoming the crisis. Many respondents framed the causes in terms of ‘scapegoats’ whom they blamed for the crisis, and the remedies in terms of ‘panaceas’ which they looked to for rescue. We have divided the Results section into perceived scapegoats and perceived panaceas. However, first, we note that respondents perceived the fisheries as being in a crisis situation: KI-14, an academic marine scientist, said “*We have gone through hell in this country and we are now all of us in ‘survival mode’. Our system is unfair and unequal: it defies all your principles because we are all struggling to live at least to see the next day. So how to survive now is more important than*

thinking about tomorrow". Respondents also testified to their dependence on the fisheries: *"it is our very important source of protein that the commonest man can afford. It brings income, employment: our local fisheries has employed over 50% of our youths, it is very important to us"* [KI-4, fish processor].

4.1. Scapegoats

We found five main scapegoats in the interview transcripts: foreigners, industrial fishers, artisanal fishers, fishers' unions, and (most of all) the government.

4.1.1. Foreigners

A familiar trope in the scapegoat literature is the characterisation of foreigners as scapegoats. KI-5, a fisheries officer, asked, rhetorically, *"Sierra Leone happens to be one of the least developed countries of the world . . . so why do foreigners come to plunder our resources?"* KI-13, a fisher, said *"the problem is that the foreign fishermen are evil-minded people, they attack our fishermen, they take all the fish in our water"* KIs in Sierra Leone identified three types of foreigners as scapegoats: Chinese, Westerners, and West Africans. On the Chinese, KI-11, a fish merchant, said Chinese vessels sneakily fish at night to avoid detection: *"These Chinese fishermen do not fish during the day, they fish only at night when we have all slept . . . we come out at midnight to watch these big boats steal our fish"*. KI-6, a fisheries scientist, claimed the Chinese criminally falsified their paperwork to pretend the fish they catch in Sierra Leone's waters come from China:

"Sierra Leone says if you catch fish from our water, you must label the carton 'product from SL', but if you look in the Chinese vessels their cartons are all labelled 'products from China'. This is why China is always saying that they 'have the largest export of fish', because they are catching fish from all over the world and writing 'product from China' . . . So it is criminality that some Chinese still use the Chinese label for our fish".

KI-4, a fish processor, said: *"Chinese are bad fishermen, they fish illegally and cause so much problems for our fishermen. They are not good people"*. On Westerners, KI-5, a ministry official, accused the World Bank of cheating the country by forcing a wealth creation strategy on Sierra Leone's fisheries governance rather than a food security strategy which the fishers wanted: *"The World Bank will not listen to us [the marine]—they do not consult us. It is disheartening to say that that \$70,000 which could have been spent on other development programmes in Sierra Leone was spent on paying consultants from abroad. The west will always cheat us blacks"*. KI-21, a village head, criticised western trawlers for over-fishing in Sierra Leone's waters: *"Western countries should help us and not carry away all our fish"*. KI-9, a senior harbour master, accused the West of manufacturing harmful fishing nets: *"talk to the western world to stop producing these nets. If they are not producing, we won't buy them . . . The net is evil . . . The west should stop producing monofilament and other bad nets"*. On West Africans, KI-10, an assistant harbour master, held that *"Guinea has the world's worst fishermen, they corrupted our fishermen"*.

However, there was some pushback against scapegoating of foreigners. For example, KI-6, an academic marine scientist, said foreign fishing companies provided loans, gear and employment to Sierra Leoneans, and paid large licence fees to the government:

"In fact, some fishers get support—they get loans from these foreigners. The Koreans buy boats and fishing gears for some of them and so when the fishers catch fish they sell particular species to them . . . the foreigners pay better and I know fishers want them to buy their fish . . . some [Koreans] do not catch but buy because they target inshore fish and if they buy trawlers they will not be allowed to fish inshore. So they now support artisanal fishers to fish for them because they are not prevented from fishing inshore . . . At least 45% of their crew are our people . . . The industrial sector is contributing foreign exchange for the country, we know for instance that the Tuna vessel pays something like 45,000 dollars per year. From . . . 2010 to last year, revenue collection for this sector has

moved from 6 million Leones a year to 57 billion Leones per year . . . So fisheries is now one of the three revenue earners for government”.

Likewise, KI-8, an outreach fisheries officer, said: *“the Koreans are helping the fishermen make more money”.* Similar remarks were made by KI-9, a senior harbour master, and KI-12, a community management association (CMA) executive. Moreover, several respondents praised foreign organisations and NGOs for the support they gave to artisanal fishers. For example, KI-9, a senior harbour master, said: *“The only development we see are those built or brought in by foreigners or the World Bank or the African Development Bank...Sometimes some NGOs come here to work for us, almost every good thing you see like the fish processing unit were built by foreigners. Even workshops are sponsored by foreigners . . . These foreign NGOs empower me more than our government”.*

4.1.2. Industrial Fishers

Much of the animus against foreigners was because they used large-scale vessels with big trawls to engage in ‘industrial’ fishing, and instead of confining themselves to offshore areas in Sierra Leone’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) they came illegally into inshore areas within the inshore economic zone (IEZ) which were designated exclusively for small-scale fishers (SSF). KI-12, a CMA executive, claimed *“The industrial fishermen no longer fancy fishing at the EEZ, now they fish at the IEZ where the local fishers fish. These industrial vessels end up cutting the nets of local fishermen and they do not pay for such damages”.* KI-20, a local councillor, said *“they tell our fishermen to take them to court because they have more money and opportunity to win any court case . . . It is pure cheating, they [industrial fishers] are taking advantage of us [local fishermen]. Some of these fishermen are not working now because their nets are damaged by the trawlers . . . Artisanal fishers are indigenes and by right should have and enjoy more fishing rights than the trawler people”.* KI-21, a village head, said *“Sometimes, you can pursue the case for 1-2 years and nothing comes out of it . . . they [industrial fishers] are wicked because they don’t consider how . . . fisherman will survive without nets.”.* KI-7, a fisher, claimed industrial trawlers were also responsible for large-scale discarding of unwanted fish: *“Because they like big fish, when they catch small fish small fish that is by-catch, they just throw it back into the sea. This is a serious problem because the fish will float and as long as other fish see that they avoid the area”.* KI-9, a senior harbour master, said industrial fishers fish in breeding areas: *“They are wicked and mad because they fish in estuaries where fish breeds, if the trawler comes trawling inside here it spoils the fish egg because this is a breeding zone”.* KI-21, a village head, said *“They are destroying our fisheries”.* KI-5, a ministry official, said *“unregulated and unreported fishing . . . is largely because of industrial vessels coming into our shores to plunder our resources”.* KI-14, an academic researcher, said illegal industrial fishing cost the country millions of dollars’ worth of lost fish: *“There is an estimate that we lose about 9 million dollars yearly from illegal fishing”.*

KI-20, a local councillor, claimed that the observers on board industrial vessels were paid by the vessel owners, so they did not report violations: *“This is why the marine observers always support the foreign trawlers. This is . . . why we do not have any witness to confirm our damage—all the marine observers work for the interest of foreign trawlers”.* As a result, KI-14, an academic marine scientist, said the fisheries data they had to work with were inadequate: *“The reports we get from the observers are very scanty, and there is very little or nothing to make out from it”.* KI-14 also said that the transponders which the government installed on industrial vessels to monitor their movements 24 h a day were easily circumvented: *“the problem is that sometimes they turn them off. The . . . people that manage the vessels . . . do this when they want to steal and they will tell you that there was a problem somewhere”.*

On the other hand, some respondents defended industrial fishers. For example, KI-14, despite his criticisms, offered this counter-attack: *“It is industrial fishing that gives revenue to this country, it is much better organized than the artisanal fishing. The industrial sector has people that take detailed records of the catch, the time it was caught, the species, everything is well documented”.*

4.1.3. Artisanal Fishers

KI-15, a senior fisheries officer, argued that artisanal fishers were worse than industrial fishers: *“Our [artisanal] fishermen do illegal fishing so much even more than the industrial people”*. Some interviewees blamed artisanal fishers for the fisheries crisis because they caught small fish. KI-15 claimed: *“The worst set of people are the artisanal fishers . . . They say that the industrial people are their problems but they [artisanal fishers] enjoy catching juveniles and we have been telling them to stop”*. KI-16, an outreach fisheries officer, claimed *“Our fishermen are very stubborn, they know the right thing to do, but they will never do it. When they do things that are not correct, they know . . . they know what they are doing, they just don’t want to abide by the rule”*. KI-5, a ministry official, asserted that some artisanal fishers were delusional: *“some of our people argue that that ‘fish comes from the sky’, they don’t think the stock can be overexploited that is why they overfish”*. KI-8, an outreach fisheries officer, demonised artisanal fishers as wicked and destructive:

“Honestly, the worst job on earth is to control fishermen—they are wicked and stubborn. They will not take instructions . . . We try to enforce these laws on the fishermen but still these fishermen will not abide to this law . . . I think they are naturally hardened . . . they are not law-abiding people . . . Local people do not know how to manage things, they want to be in control of this building, I mean the office that we are in now. But we know that when it is handed over to them, they will destroy it and spoil most of the facilities in it . . . some of them [fishers] will tell you we [the marine] have locked the cold room but if you leave it open, they will destroy everything that is inside. We [the marine], will not lock up the cold rooms without reasons”.

KI-1, an administrator at SLAFU, said *“Our people fish in areas that fishing should not be done especially in the breeding grounds—the estuarine”*. KI-3, a secretary of SLAFU, accused artisanal fishers of using small-mesh nets: *“When they go to fish they catch small fish and even fish eggs . . . [They] are killing the ecosystem”*. KI-9, a senior harbour master, held that *“The evil fishermen terrorise our fish breeding ground . . . Our fishermen still use that bad method even after their nets were seized and burnt they replaced them with another bad net”*. KI-20, a local councillor, said fishers in Tumbo hide their nets: *“Tumbo is big, it has small villages and so fishermen . . . go to sea and catch fish and then hide their nets in their many corners. It is hard to completely monitor fishing in a place like Tumbo”*. KI-6, a fisheries scientist, said artisanal fishers even used poison. KI-7, a fisher, said *“About 80% of fishermen do bad fishing”*. KI-12, a CMA executive, stated *“More than 80% are illiterates they do not agree that one day the fish will finish”*. KI-13, a fisher, sees artisanal fishers as ‘wicked’: *“It is wickedness . . . Wickedness is the main reason. People think it is poverty, but it is not”*.

KI-3, secretary of SLAFU, blamed artisanal fishers for blackmailing politicians into protecting them: *“We will vote for you, but Marine is disturbing us, they want to seize our net, if you don’t stop them we will not vote for you’*. This sort of talk scare our politicians”. Likewise, KI-7, a fisher, said *“Fishing is where everybody in Tumbo earn their living. If government stop people and do not provide alternatives, our people will vote them out”*. KI-3, secretary of SLAFU reported that artisanal fishers were sometimes violent towards authorities: *“We have been beaten here before by the fishermen because we seized their boats. One of us was beaten to coma, if not for the help of people around I would have been long forgotten because their intention was to kill us”*. Likewise, KI-10, assistant harbour master, reported that *“here in Yoribe, to Shenge bad fishermen are unstoppable and they will fight you. About four years ago, this brought serious fight in Shenge the fishermen almost killed the people that tried to stop them. They beat up these officials mercilessly”*.

However, some respondents defended the artisanal sector on grounds of sectoral poverty. For example, KI-3, secretary of SLAFU, said *“Poverty is everywhere in our community and that is why people are fishing illegally”*. Likewise, KI-10, assistant harbour master, said *“Poverty is a . . . very big reason why people defy laws. Poverty makes some very stubborn . . . It is hard to survive here in Sierra Leone, we are a very poor country . . . the pressure of survival causes them to think this way”*. KI-7, a fisher, agreed: *“poverty is a big problem . . . our people depend so much on fishing and there is no substitute yet . . . it is very difficult to stop them from fishing any*

way because they have to feed their families and they have responsibilities. It is very difficult to stop them from using bad gears”.

4.1.4. Rivalry between Fishers’ Unions

Several respondents blamed conflict between the two fishers’ unions—Sierra Leone Artisanal Fishers’ Union (SLAFU) and Sierra Leone Artisanal Amalgamated Fishers’ Union (SLAAFU)—for the dire condition of the country’s coastal fisheries. SLAFU was established with governmental support 20 years ago to represent the interests of artisanal fishers in their relations with management and judicial systems. SLAAFU was established with governmental support over 11 years ago by fishers who were disgruntled with the performance of SLAFU in looking after their interests, not least because of allegations of misuse of a fund collected from fishers’ dues paid to the harbour master, and there has been bitter rivalry between the two organisations ever since. KI-4, a fish processor, said *“there is no unity between these two unions . . . Every day they fight each other”*. KI-10, an assistant harbour master who supported SLAFU, said this division undermined SLAFU’s efforts to curb illegal fishing: *“The SLAFU had a difficult time fighting bad fishermen because these bad fishers have government support. So when SLAFU is saying ‘please don’t fish using bad method’, the SLAAFU who are bad fishermen will say ‘use bad method’ and the government supports SLAAFU”*. KI-12, a CMA executive who also supported SLAFU, said *“SLAFU are good people that are helping our fisheries, SLAAFU are not good they only collect money from channel fishermen and as CMA, we do not acknowledge them. SLAAFU separated from SLAFU because they want to be getting money from illegal fishermen. I don’t know why the government registered them as an organisation under our fisheries because they are destroying it for us. They support bad fishermen”*.

KI-14, an academic marine scientist, said the union conflict made a viable relationship between artisanal fishers and the government impossible: *“SLAFU people and SLAAFU people do not have a strong relationship with the ministry. SLAFU or SLAAFU cannot say precisely how they are helping the ministry to manage their resources efficiently. They do not speak to each other . . . The ministry and fisheries organisations should be working in harmony, so that important information about fisheries can be passed down to the fishing families because they are all part of the chain . . . but the reality . . . is that the link between the ministry and the locals is missing”*.

However, several respondents defended the unions against scapegoating, saying the blame for the conflict between them lay with the government. For example, KI-21, a village head who supported SLAAFU, claimed the government favoured SLAFU and failed to recognise the good work being done by SLAAFU in engaging with ‘bad’ fishers such as the channel or estuary fisherman rather than ostracising them which was SLAFU’s policy:

“Our government is just talking from their office; they are not empowering our fishermen to change to good fishing. You see our government supports SLAFU and they [SLAFU] also have channel fishermen . . . Is this a union? No, a union must consider everybody and then begin the change from inside. SLAAFU is a better union because they picked every fisherman whether good or bad and they are changing them gradually”.

KI-21, a village head, said the government was directly responsible for the conflict between SLAFU and SLAAFU by encouraging the development of rival fishers’ unions: *“Because they don’t want the local fishermen to come together . . . they are . . . ‘giving that union certificate, giving another union certificate’. Now the fishermen are divided . . . Who is the cause? It is the government because they don’t want us to come together . . . What they want is to put division between us, now the two unions are fighting themselves”*. KI-7, a fisher, said this is a classic tactic of divide and rule: *“This is the tactics government use to divide us [artisanal fishermen] and now we don’t have a common voice. Some belong to SLAFU others SLAAFU”*. KI-3, secretary of SLAFU, said the government would not cooperate with SLAFU to combat illegal fishing: *“The Director [of the Marine] has refused to work with us”*. KI-3 said the government set up the CMAs to undermine SLAFU: *“the CMA was formed to destroy our organisation because most CMA members were already our members and now we cannot control the CMA executive that use bad fishing method . . . [and] some of their leaders are government agents”*.

4.1.5. Government

Following on from the last point, the most frequent scapegoat was the government. KI-7, a fisher, said *“our government is responsible for all the problems”*. KI-1, an administrator at SLAFU, said *“our politicians frustrate whatever efforts are made to better our fisheries here . . . politics is an acute problem that is destroying our fishing sector . . . The politician counts his success as winning election not repairing our fisheries”*. KI-10, an assistant harbour master, said *“Our government . . . put politics first before our fish”*. KI-3, a secretary of SLAFU stated *“They are using fish to bargain for their [political] parties. Sierra Leone government don’t love the country, they only love their parties”*. KI-3, a secretary of SLAFU, blamed the government for keeping the people in poverty: *“we keep saying Sierra Leone is a poor country. it is not poor, it is a rich country with poor people. Sierra Leone has over 32 different types of mineral resources but the people are poor. our problem is bad government. On the issue of fishing regulations, our politicians have stopped every form of enforcement for their own interest”*.

For example, KI-9, a senior harbour master, said the government failed to curb illegal industrial fishing: *“Our joint surveillance team has not done anything to stop or even reduce the number of illegal trawlers that cause problems for us here. These illegal trawlers are increasing by the day”*. KI-11, a fish merchant, said *“My problem with them [the marine] is that they do not take action when we report that industrial fishermen are disturbing us here”*. KI-13, a fisher, said the government favoured industrial fishers because they paid bribes: *“The marine care only about the trawler fishermen that bribe them, they do not regard the local fishermen like me. The trawler fishermen are thieves and the marine works with them”*. KI-7, a fisher, said government officials took bribes from foreign fishers: *“Our government is hypocritical about foreign vessels because of bribery . . . They collect bribes from these foreigners . . . These foreigners bribe government agents with dollars, pounds sterling . . . There are good laws in the book, but . . . because of bribery they are overlooked”*. KI-8, an outreach fisheries officer, claimed *“The major problem with the marine and navy surveillance is that we discovered that both our Marine and Navy representatives work secretly with these industrial fishermen. They give our intelligence to these foreigners and then collect cash”*.

The government was also accused of failing to curb illegal artisanal fishing. KI-12, a CMA executive, claimed the government politicised fish by treating artisanal fishers leniently in order to get their votes: *“The whole of our fishing sector is politicised by politicians . . . Everything in the fisheries is politicised . . . The present government is only interested in votes and not fish and they have told fishermen to fish anyhow and vote for them”*. KI-10, an assistant harbour master, explained how politicians protect offenders from prosecution: *“Politicians have spoilt everything. They like people to vote for them and because of this they sometimes fight the marine officials that stop bad fishing. If any bad fisherman that is a friend to a politician calls the politician saying, ‘they [the marine] seized my net’, the politician will stop the official immediately . . . This is why our fishing here is very bad and it is getting worse”*. KI-3, a secretary of SLAFU, said *“political interference is the main cause of all our problems”*. Likewise, KI-12, a CMA executive, said *“Without the political will to stop bad fishing nothing will change”*. KI-6, an academic researcher, said *“the government is killing the sector”*. KI-1 said the government thereby put the lives of SLAFU members in danger: *“when government gives fishers the right to fish illegally, attempts to stop them resulted in us receiving great beatings of our lives, so we have to be careful . . . The fishermen almost killed some of us, they beat one of us to coma, it was God that saved his life”*.

KI-7, a fisher, said politicians were appointed minister of fisheries because of their political connections, not their knowledge of fisheries: *“They make these idiots minister of fisheries even when they don’t know anything”*. KI-15, a senior fisheries officer, criticised the government for lack of investment in the fisheries sector. KI-5, a ministry official, admitted that *“last year there was no budgetary allocation to fisheries. Since 2011, we have not done any fish stock assessment, even to collect data on landing site is a very big problem . . . The government does not want to invest in the fisheries sector”*. Inadequate funding meant lack of fisheries data, and some respondents blamed the lack of reliable data on fishing activity for the dire condition of the stocks. As KI-14, an academic marine scientist, put it, *“without the data you cannot*

manage your resources". KI-5, a ministry scientist, said neither the industrial sector nor the artisanal sector provided trustworthy data on their catches. In the case of the industrial sector, catch data came from on-board observers who were paid by the vessels' owners, not by the government, which raised a question mark about the veracity of their data reports. As a result, KI-14 said the fisheries data they had to work with from the industrial sector were inadequate: *"The reports we get from the observers are very scanty, and there is very little or nothing to make out from it"*. In the case of the artisanal sector, *"we have not got the adequate funding to have a random distribution of enumerators, if not in all, the landing sites"* (KI-14). Hence, said KI-5, *"We only have researchers that come up with assumptions all the time, that is not research . . . if you want to make a sound assessment or recommendation, it should be based on sound research"*. KI-14 said *"it is only when we have this [data], that one can see the extent of how communities have wrecked the fisheries"*. Lack of data is perceived by respondents as a failure by government to provide the resources needed to obtain information. KI-5, a senior fisheries official, said under-investment was economic illiteracy, because a World Bank report stated that *"if our government can invest as little as £5 million yearly in our fisheries with effective management we can make over 50 million dollars plus"*.

KI-10, an assistant harbour master, said fishers did not trust the government because in 2008, the Minister of Fisheries, Hajiya Aishatu Kabal, confiscated and burnt their bad nets but broke her promise to replace them free with good nets, and fishers had to buy the good nets: *"Now tell me how our fishermen can trust their government again. About 50–60 fishermen from this community were deceived and they submitted their nets for nothing . . . Our government are liars and nobody . . . will ever trust them again"*. Similar statements were made by KI-7, a fisher, and KI-3, secretary of SLAFU.

However, some respondents defended the government. For example, KI-9, a senior harbour master, claimed *"The marine are helping us whenever we take our problems to them. Like our complaints about the trawlers that are disturbing us, they do their best to drive them outside of the IEZ. They allow organisations to come in and help us the fishermen, so marine is very helpful"*. KI-4, a fish processor, said *"The government assists them because the money from licences that they collect from our local fishermen are what they put back for the development of our community"*. KI-2, a Chandler, sympathised with the government's dilemma in having to make hard choices: *"Our government has to balance or choose between destroying the ecosystem or the life of our poor people"*. KI-10, an assistant harbour master, explained that the government was understandably reluctant to exert force on artisanal fishers for fear of re-igniting civil war hostilities: *"when we planned to go and fight them at the sea our government said 'No' and some other people thought it was not a good idea because we just came out of a civil war and fighting these bad fishermen might cause another war and then it will affect our country again"*.

4.2. Panaceas

Turning to the concept of panaceas, we found three main panaceas in the interview transcripts: coercion; sensitisation; and co-management. There is a sense in which each of these three panaceas is broadly linked to a particular transgressor: coercion to curb the industrial sector (though also the artisanal sector); sensitisation to reform the artisanal sector; and co-management to put pressure on the government.

4.2.1. Coercion

Several respondents claimed that what is needed is coercion to force both industrial and artisanal fishers to comply with the law. KI-5, a senior fisheries officer, said *"We are concerned about illegal fishing . . . ensuring that sanctions are strong enough to serve as deterrence . . . [to] illegal fishing in all forms not only on the side of the industrial fishers but also on the side of the small-scale fisheries"*. KI-15, another senior fisheries officer, said fishers respond to force: *"our people like it when you use force on them and trust me you will succeed . . . if we use the military and the police we will succeed because we tried it in 2009 and almost succeeded, but because of this political interference everything died down and returned back to zero"*. KI-16, a fisheries officer in Tumbo, said coercion does work. KI-21, a village head, claimed that

force used by the government in 2008 had a lasting effect on fishers' behaviour in Goderich. KI-7, a fisher, said *"government . . . have the laws and if they stand very hard against these evil fishermen, our water will be good"*. KI-8, an outreach fisheries officer, said

"I want the government to create very strict laws, harder laws. I mean laws that are harder than the law that governs Sierra Leone. I am proposing this because if you talk about people that are very stubborn and difficult to deal with they are the fishermen. They are hardened...Honestly I am tired of this kind of people . . . We try to enforce these laws on the fishermen but still these fishermen will not abide to this law except they are punished . . . if they [the government] are serious and start arresting bad fishermen, others will stop".

He rejected the 'excuse' for illegal artisanal fishing that they were poor and had no choice if they were to feed their families: *"The mistake so many people make is to say that poverty is the reason why these people do all these things . . . [Some] fishers do not abide to the law because of poverty, but not all of them are poor. I think they are naturally hardened"*.

KI-1, an administrator in SLAFU, claimed if the government used force to support the efforts of SLAFU, illegal artisanal fishing would end overnight: *"if the government sincerely makes up its mind and says 'this area is a no-go area, whoever goes there will be punished', I know our fishermen will rethink and then stop fishing in wrong areas . . . Government has all the machinery to fight irresponsible fishing"*. Likewise, KI-10, an assistant harbour master, said *"if government empowers us at the grassroots we can handle them [bad fishermen] better. All we need is a good surveillance boat and soldiers on board to kill these fishermen if they mess up. It is simple! If we want fishermen to fish well, we must learn to enforce laws"*. KI-11, a fish merchant, said the CMA was preparing itself to use force against illegal fishing:

"This time we are planning to also have soldiers on board. It will not only be our CMA officials like in the past. The Navy will accompany us and arrest all bad fishermen that are caught in the act . . . At some point in life you have to face your enemy in whatever form it comes. We are the ones directly affected, we are first hand witnesses of this problem so we cannot allow it to continue. Our unborn children will not have fish if we do not act fast and now".

KI-3, a secretary of SLAFU, said *"Sierra Leone people are very easy to control, only set an example with one, the others will be afraid to commit the same offence"*.

However, one respondent rejected coercion as a panacea for stopping illegal fishing, KI-12 said coercion did not work: *"we cannot force bad fishermen to stop, we can only continue to explain the dangers of bad fishing to them"*.

4.2.2. Sensitisation

Many fishers claim the solution lies in persuading artisanal fishers to abandon their illegal methods of fishing. This solution is framed in terms of an extensive 'sensitisation programme' (KI-3, secretary of SLAFU). KI-15, a senior fisheries official, explained that it worked best when it targeted young fishers:

"Everywhere, you go in the world, fishermen are stubborn. Some of them cannot accept laws easily except you continue to cajole them, be nice to them, play with them, then some might consider you and say 'ok, it is true, what you have said is the right thing'. But it is not easy. When I was at Conor, I always go out to do sensitisation and one of my strategies is to work with the youths because they are so much involved in fishing activities . . . I always engage them, talk to them the importance of fisheries, the way it was before and now the difference. I always sit with them and explain to them the problems and the losses their parents are encountering now and so by doing so, I achieved a lot. In some communities, I succeeded because you know young people can talk to their parents and the parents listen to them, this strategy worked well in some of our communities".

SLAFU made the sensitisation programme its central focus, as KI-1, an administrator in SLAFU, affirmed: *"We take the sensitisation of fishers as our priority, we always call meetings*

to educate our local fishermen about the meaning and also the effects of bad fishing". KI-3, secretary of SLAFU, said "We have made them to see that the consequences of overfishing will be bad for them and their future generations. We have made them to see how difficult it is to replenish fish stocks: we have asked them very hard questions about their future without fish". This is a major initiative, and SLAFU has drawn on both internal and external organisations to support its sensitisation activities. Internally, it has collaborated with the community management associations (CMAs), as KI-3 noted: "We [SLAFU] are working with them [CMA] on the sensitisation of local fishermen—we have been talking to local fishermen to see reasons why they should stop bad methods of fishing". Externally, SLAFU has benefitted from funding by the West African Association for the Development of Artisanal Fisheries [WADAF], as KI-1, an administrator with SLAFU, explained:

"Seven African countries (Senegal, Mauritania, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Conakry, Sierra Leone and Cape Verde) all belong to an umbrella organisation called the 'West African Association for the Development of Artisanal Fisheries' (WADAF). The aim of this organisation is to help clean up the artisanal sector of member countries. Here in Sierra Leone, our membership of WADAF has helped us a great deal . . . they are working to help our artisanal fisheries sector here, they want to see that the current situation is under control . . . WADAF gave us a small amount of money to add to what we have . . . This money will be used for sensitising the people to stop illegal fishing".

Additionally, the World Bank has funded SLAFU's sensitisation programme: "the World Bank project managed by Dr Sankoh . . . has given us about 60 million Leones to do sensitisation. We completed this and gave out reports to the World Bank, we did sensitisation in Shenge, Bond and here in Tumbo and some of our colleagues got money from the same source to do sensitisations in the north" [KI-1].

However, some respondents said fishers were resistant to sensitisation programmes. For example, KI-15, a senior fisheries officer, said "Our fishermen are too wicked . . . I think it is illiteracy because whatever you tell them to do they always see it as force: 'you want to force me to do something' . . . It is hard to work with fishermen". Moreover, some respondents questioned SLAFU's credentials as a sensitisation agency. For example, KI-13, a fisher, said "SLAFU is not a good organisation, they are not helping us. They do not consult me as the master fisherman, they do their things alone. I and some people from our CMA do not identify with them". Likewise, KI-9, a senior harbour master, said SLAFU did not communicate with fishers on the ground: "They fail to organise the grassroots; they fail to call for meetings".

4.2.3. Co-Management

Several respondents argued for co-management between the government and local communities as the panacea. KI-7, a fisher, wanted to restrict top-down management to a minimum: "There should be very minimal political interference in the fisheries otherwise it will forever damage our fisheries. Government come and go, but fish is our life wire". KI-5, a senior ministry official, explained that the creation of the CMAs was an attempt to involve local communities in fisheries management:

"under the fisheries act, power was devolved to the communities . . . The whole idea is we think that fisheries governance should not be coming from the top alone, it should be interactive. To this end, we thought that the active involvement of the fishermen and the local communities will be useful. This was why we established the CMAs, that was why we devolved the licencing and management of artisanal fishing to the local council in anticipation that things will be fine".

KI-15, a senior fisheries officer, explained how the CMA was set up by the fisheries ministry with foreign aid as a co-management system:

"through the support of the 'West African Regional Fisheries Programme', sponsored by the World Bank, we tried to form co-management. That is, we formed links between the fishermen and other stakeholders involved in fisheries management like the fish processors, transporters, timber cutters, boat carpenters. We do not go to the communities to impose

laws and rules on fishermen. We thought it fit that they should form their organisations though we helped them organise themselves”.

KI-12, a CMA executive, claimed the CMA was a vital element of fisheries co-management, carrying out functions that the government was unable to perform by itself:

“You see the CMA is a very important part of co-management . . . This is co-management to help us manage our own resources . . . One of the reasons marine developed the CMA was because of harassment that they face because whenever they come down to the community our people disturb them a lot saying ‘you don’t remember us, you did this and you did that, the marine is not good’ . . . Marine is good to us, our relationship is cordial”.

KI-16, a local fisheries officer, said CMAs know their communities much better than the government does: *“Community surveillance is important and it is not just for the Navy, or our staff [fisheries ministry], we need to include the community people too. So this is why it is important because they know how to talk to their people, they know the problems in their communities”.* However, KI-21, a village head, said the CMAs needed more resources to do their job properly:

“They [government] have said that they want to hand over the fisheries to us [CMA], but in what conditions? We have complained several times to them that we need surveillance boats but they have refused to provide it. We [CMA], are not magicians, we cannot appear in the sea and stop bad fishermen, we need surveillance boats. There is need for proper logistics and it is only us the fishermen that can do this monitoring very well because the Navy collects bribes from illegal trawlers, they are no longer trustworthy”.

Likewise, KI-3, secretary of SLAFU said *“There is need to empower the CMA because they need logistics to have people in the sea to chase illegal fishermen. These fishermen need to be chased because if you don’t chase them they will not stop”.*

However, on claims that co-management between the government and the CMAs was a panacea for illegal fishing, KI-10, an assistant harbour master, poured cold water, claiming CMA staff were themselves engaged in illegal fishing: *“They are not leading by example and how do you expect them to change other people? The kind of people we have as CMA executives are examples of bad fishermen. They promote bad fishing because they are bad fishermen themselves, they put money first before good fishing”.*

5. Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the Results section in the light of scapegoat theory and panacea theory. The results provide evidence of both scapegoating and panacea-searching in the coastal fisheries of Sierra Leone. On scapegoating, the most egregious examples were the denunciation of foreigners, the excoriation of both industrial and artisanal fishers, the contempt for fishers’ unions, and the demonisation of the government. There are elements of genuine scapegoating here because they exemplify the following features of it. (1) They arose because of a natural resource crisis (the decline in fish stocks) [6]. (2) They followed the scapegoating pattern of looking for a reason for the crisis and selecting a target group to blame [14]. (3) They were driven by hostility to target ethnic groups, especially the Chinese and Koreans [17]. (4) Some scapegoats were unjustly blamed [16]. For example, the government was blamed for both favouring the industrial fisheries sector over the artisanal sector and for favouring the artisanal sector over the industrial sector. (5) The language used against targets was sometimes vicious and inflammatory, indicative of irrationality [10]. For example, respondents said foreigners ‘plunder our resources’, they are ‘evil-minded people, they ‘attack our fishermen’, they ‘steal our fish’ surreptitiously at night, ‘they corrupted our fishermen’. Other respondents accused industrial fishers of being ‘thieves’, artisanal fishers of being ‘wicked’, ‘hardened’, ‘stubborn’, destructive, violent, murderous, blackmailers, who ‘terrorise’ fish breeding grounds. The government were accused of being ‘liars’. (6) The assumption behind some of the scapegoating was to deflect blame from those doing the scapegoating [12,18].

However, the results also show that scapegoating in the coastal fisheries of Sierra Leone was neither orthodox nor extreme. For one thing, two of the four scapegoats—artisanal fishers and the government—did not fall into the orthodox category of scapegoats. Artisanal fishers constitute a majority of the coastal population, whereas scapegoats are normally minority groups in a community. The government holds authority and power over its citizens, whereas scapegoats are normally weak and powerless, unable to fight back against their tormentors [15]. For another thing, there was more than one scapegoat, so the blame was spread among five victims, thereby diluting its impact on a single target. Additionally, in each case, there were some defenders of the victim, thereby providing some pushback to the extent and depth of scapegoating. All this indicates the heterogeneity of the scapegoating activity in this case study, which is also manifest in the variety of scapegoaters. For example, artisanal fishers scapegoated industrial fishers and foreign fishers; SLAFU members scapegoated SLAAFU members and vice versa; ministry officials and academic scientists scapegoated artisanal fishers; and nearly every group (including some government officials) scapegoated the government. Finally, there was little or no violence perpetrated upon the scapegoats (apart from one incident of forcible seizure of illegal artisanal nets by the marine, the only violence reported was damage to fixed nets by industrial trawlers and attacks on SLAFU staff by artisanal fishers).

On the question of whether scapegoating in the coastal fisheries helped to bring local communities together by expelling alien elements and thereby reinforcing group identity, there may have been some cathartic relief in blaming foreigners, but the foreigners were not expelled, and their predatory fishing continued.

On panaceaing, the most prominent examples in the results were coercion, sensitisation and co-management. There are elements of genuine panaceaing here because they meet the following features of panaceas. (1) They were sometimes advocated as single solutions or technical fixes for ending the fish scarcity crisis [19,48]. (2) They were presented alluringly with conceptual narratives [47]. (3) They exhibited heuristic biases [47] and fundamentalist assumptions [20]. Another feature of panaceaing in this case study is its heterogeneity. As with scapegoating, panaceaing took a variety of forms, with different respondents proposing different solutions. For example, coercion was recommended mainly by governmental fisheries officers but also by some SLAFU officials and a village head; sensitisation was advocated largely by SLAFU officials; and co-management was suggested by representatives of several groups, including fishers, government fisheries officers, community organisation executives and SLAFU officials. However, the community as a whole was not committed to any of these panaceas, and several respondents voiced criticism of them. For example, coercion was dismissed by some respondents as counter-productive, sensitisation as ineffective, and co-management as corrupt.

A more promising way in which the community could solve the problem of its fisheries decline was suggested by several respondents in terms of a healing process of bringing disparate groups together to find a common solution. KI-21, a village head, said *“When you want to stop someone from doing something, bring the person closer and then educate and encourage the person to stop”*. KI-16, an outreach fisheries officer, said the key is for fishers to talk to each other: *“we believe that all these things will work better, when fishermen talk to each other”*. KI-8, another outreach ministry official, claimed this was already happening to some extent in the co-management initiative whereby the CMAs were working in harmony with the government’s aim to end illegal artisanal fishing: *“The marine and the CMAs are partners in the war against illegal fishing . . . We are not expecting a rapid change, but gradually we expect that this problem of bad nets will phase out”*. However, he said more could be done to improve this partnership: *“We really need to use the CMA very well because we do not live in the community . . . but the CMA people live here. They are our eyes on the ground, so we need to take good advantage of this opportunity”*.

However, these suggestions went beyond co-management between the government and CMAs and embraced all stakeholder groups. KI-9, a senior harbour master, said they should all form a partnership: *“For all of us to work together effectively we must partner as equals*

nothing more, nothing less. It is a joint venture". KI-3 urged all organisations to put aside their differences: *"If we can put aside our grievances and differences . . . our generations yet unborn will have something to fall back on. They will say we have worked for them . . . There is need for political tolerance, we need to be reflective and accept people based on their merits . . . If we are to win the war against illegal fishing, we need to come together"*. The same message—partnership—was voiced by KI-5, a senior fisheries officer, arguing for foreign consultants to partner with local fishers rather than impose alien solutions on them: *"We want foreign partners that will not impose their ideas on us rather we want partners that will sit with us and dialogue and work in our terms and not in their terms, the way that it will favour every Sierra Leonean"*.

KI-12, a CMA executive, said there were no instant solutions and we must be patient: *"The solution of bad fishing will be gradual"*. KI-7, a fisher, said *"it will take time to be settled"*. KI-15, a senior fisheries officer, said if you do the right thing, the fishers will eventually come on board.

6. Conclusions

Summarising the findings of the paper, we discovered five kinds of scapegoating and three types of panaceaing in two coastal fishing communities in Sierra Leone. Across the world, it is possible to find some examples of scapegoating and panaceaing which have had positive effects. For instance, the global campaign of vilification against IUU vessels which are the scourge of marine fishing has had some impact in protecting some stocks from illegal overfishing. Likewise, the introduction of panaceas such as ITQs and MPAs has improved the management of fisheries in some areas. However, in general, scapegoating and panacea-searching are counterproductive, reinforcing the very problems they seek to identify or solve—deepening the divide between stakeholder groups—and so it proved in our study in Sierra Leone. We conclude that the answer to problems of fisheries decline is not to look for scapegoats or panaceas but to recognise that there are many factors that contribute to the current malaise in Sierra Leone's coastal fisheries and that the country must tackle all these factors. In addition, it must do so in an incremental, gradualist and patient fashion. Compromise, tolerance, reconciliation, partnership, and moderation are the watchwords for future success, not antagonism, blame-gaming, bitterness and simplistic solution-seeking. Stakeholders should be healing divisions, not reinforcing them, which is what both scapegoating and panaceaing do. As a postscript, it is worth noting that scapegoating is much more inimical to healing than is panaceaing. While it is difficult to imagine how invective against foreigners, industrial fishers, artisanal fishers, and the government can promote healing, it is not inconceivable that modest elements of coercion, sensitisation, and co-management could form part of a healing strategy. Future researchers might consider ways in which elements of panaceaing and even scapegoating could be managed in a positive direction.

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