Not enough to eat: Fish for food security in coastal areas of Tanzania

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Coastal populations in Tanzania rely on fish as a source of protein, income and livelihoods. This is especially common among rural coastal people where small-scale fisheries are widespread and other sources of animal protein are scarce. Despite some improvements by the government commitments to address hunger and nutrition, the availability and access to cheap protein sources particularly fish for coastal populations is decreasing. Current projections indicate future supply shortfalls and distribution gaps in some districts of the country. Socio-economic drivers such as increasing human population and lack of income alternatives for coastal people, often have a negative effect on the type and quantity of fish products in their diets. Likewise, increasing prices for fish and the growing demand of fish for touristic hotels have greatly surpassed local population access and availability of fish for their nutritional consumption. Identifying the drivers of decreasing fish consumption for both hunger and nutritional needs is a fundamental step to support efforts to eradicate hunger. It is especially relevant for developing countries like Tanzania where multiple manifestation of hunger such as stunting, wasting and underweight among children aged under five are still common despite government’s concerted efforts and actions to combat hunger. This article identify and then discuss some of the changing patterns in fish consumption among coastal people. Results show that small-scale fishers are unable to catch sufficient fish to meet the protein and income needs of rural communities. The article describes plausible investments in fisheries sector and outlines other steps that governments and their development partners need to take to establish and maintain nearshore fisheries as part of national wide strategy for enhancing food security.