

Strategies for Handling Small Caribbean Island Fishery Problems

HORACE D. WALTERS
Fisheries Officer
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries,
Land and Cooperatives
Castries, Saint Lucia

In presenting strategies for handling small Caribbean island fishery problems, there is the basic concept that government recognizes the role which fisheries can play in national economic, social and nutritional development. In this context, alternative objectives have to be identified, for example, food production, the earning of foreign exchange, the creation of employment and generation of income, resource conservation and management. Governments therefore have to determine their own policies, priorities and objectives, taking into consideration their particular situation and circumstances.

It is recognized that the fisheries sector is primary productive, and that there ought to be the political will and a high level of commitment by Government. However, it is sometimes very difficult to match such commitment in dollar terms, because of the scarcity of financial resources, in the face of tight competition from other sectors such as, agriculture, education, health and the provision of other basic social services. Consequently, the strategies which are finally adopted, although reflecting government's recognition of the importance of the fisheries sector, may not be as dynamic as they ought to be, in order to achieve the rapid development which the sector can bring about.

The fishery sector of St. Lucia and the small island states of the OECS region are primarily inshore and artisanal, and have evolved over the years without a very high level of government involvement. In this regard, the basic concern of government has been to maintain a level of production and income generation, while exploring the possibility for further development of the sector.

In more recent times, however, a new awareness has been stimulated by enthusiastic fisheries officers of the sub-region and much collaboration and harmonization have been achieved for a more orderly and rapid development of the fishery sector.

In the case of St. Lucia the areas of high priority have been identified as follows:

- Marketing and production
- Generation of income
- Resource management
- Improvements in fishing boats, gear and methods
- Infrastructure development
- Training

In order to meaningfully address the problem of fisheries development and management, it is recognized that fisheries administration is pivotal to the attainment of success in these

areas. Consequently, much emphasis has been placed on developing a human resource capacity to carry out the task of solving some of the chronic problems associated with fisheries development in this small island state.

For many of the OECS states where fisheries development problems are similar, and the availability of funds scarce, a regional strategy appears to be desirable, since the exploitation and management of the resources are closely linked. In giving consideration to a sub-regional strategy for handling small Caribbean island fishery problems, it must be recognized that the OECS states are at varying stages of fishery development. As a result, where one state already has a capability which is non-existent in others, the concept of technical co-operation among developing countries (TCDC) must be emphasized.

St. Lucia has identified the major problem associated with its fishery development, and has taken basic measures to alleviate the situation. However, the knowledge gained over the years could be shared with other states, so that they would avoid the pitfalls and mistakes which characterize the successful attainment of national goals. Whereas, in the case of St. Lucia, a fishery administration has been in the process of development for many years, other OECS states could pattern their own administrative development, giving due cognizance to their individual priorities and problem areas. In this context (TCDC) could be arranged to compare problem areas and to identify requirements for individual territorial solutions.

In the context of marketing, there are basic infrastructural facilities and institutional arrangements which have to be in place on an individual country basis, whether they be the construction of cold storage or the establishment of an organized distribution system for fish. Thus, the theme could be to achieve the easiest and most cost effective solutions. Recognizing that a proper marketing system is the basis for encouraging production, one of the most obvious results from this development would be the generation of income.

In taking a decision to develop the fisheries sector in which production and marketing play an important role, the other aspects of such development must be addressed equally, and reference is therefore made to the management of the resource.

In developing a human resource capability to address the specific problem of resource management, a decision could be made so that increased exploitation or access to the resources would be controlled until the basis status of the stocks are known. In other words, increased exploitation of the resource would not be encouraged on a larger scale, unless certain parameters pertaining to resource availability, have been carefully identified. In this regard, basic landing and biological data would have to be recorded to give the managers an opportunity to conduct basic stock assessment.

Consideration of the development of the fisheries sector in isolation, or as an unrelated group of strategies, could result in developments in fishing boats, gear and methods which could have adverse effects on resources, if side by side, the necessary stock assessments were not carried out.

In projecting regional fisheries development and management for the OECS states, it is the view, based on a historical perspective of species, migrations and conservation, that the need exists at the present time to develop a cadre of regional expertise to address the development of fisheries in the sub-region.

In this context, the Organization of East Caribbean States (OECS) could develop a fisheries desk which would attract competent officers in the following areas:

- Fisheries development, planning and administration
- Fishery resource management
- Fishing boats, gear and methods
- Fish marketing and preservation
- Fisheries economics

This cadre of specialists would identify individual states work programs, priorities and problem areas, and collaborate in developing suitable local and sub-regional programs which would be implemented by national governments and the regional organization responsible for fisheries development.