

**EU/ACP Fisheries
Relations: towards a
greater sustainability**

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**SUSTAINABLE EXPLOITATION OF MARITIME STOCKS IN
THE WEST AFRICAN MARINE ECO-REGION WITHIN THE
CONTEXT OF ACP-EU RELATION**

INTRODUCTION

This paper will mainly focus on the Western Africa Marine Eco-Region, (WAMER) composed of Mauritania, Senegal, Cape Verde, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea. Since all the countries in this eco-region, except The Gambia, have fisheries agreements with the European Union (EU), they provide an interesting example of ACP-EU relations in the fishery sector.

In the WAMER eco-region, the fishery sector is a source of foreign currency, jobs and food for more than 22 million people. A look at the current fishery stock shows alarming trends: decrease in average size of fish caught, reduction in Catch per Unit of Effort (CPUE) for various species, especially the coastal demersals,¹ etc. Depletion of marine stocks would have disastrous economic and social effects.

The worldwide crisis in the fisheries sector has prompted the development of the sustainable fishing concept. Although the word "sustainable" only became fashionable in 1987 through the popularisation of the concept of sustainable development², the concept of sustainable agriculture and sustainable society had already been discussed for the preceding years in North America³.

Back in 1976, Stivers (1976)⁴ spoke about a sustainable society which he defined as a society based on a sustainable economy supported by and in harmony with the eco-system, an economy that keeps the consumption of non-renewable resources to a minimum and concentrates on non-polluting activities that are not harmful for the environment³.

To accurately view the question of sustainability of exploitation of maritime resources in West Africa in the context of ACP-EU fishery relations, it is important to start by considering the problem of the fisheries agreements.

Thereupon, it would be interesting to analyse the sustainability of maritime resources exploitation via the various components of the fisheries system. This could contribute to recommendations on improving ACP-EU relations in this field.

1. FISHERIES AGREEMENTS

As marine resources become increasingly scarce, new fisheries agreements, over the years, are heightening tension between the fishery administrations, fishermen's organisations and industry. But this does not discourage the coastal states — essentially out of financial need — from continuing to such agreements with the EU.

It has been established that growing resource scarcity creates numerous problems, including conflicts over stock exploitation. This increasingly brings up questions on whether it is appropriate to conclude more fisheries agreements. In more general terms, professionals working in this sector blame the agreements, the foreign vessels and the policies implemented by states in the sub-region for the overexploitation of fish stocks.

¹ PAULY D. 2002. International Symposium on Marine Fisheries and Societies in West Africa: Half a Century of Change, held in Dakar, 24-28 June 2002.

² BRUNDTLAND H. 1987. Sustainable Agriculture and Integrated Farming Systems. *Michigan State University Press*, pp: 166-184.

³ ESTEVEZ B. and DOMON G. 1999. Les enjeux sociaux de l'agriculture durable – Un débat de société ? Une perspective nord-américaine. *Le Courrier de l'Environnement*, n° 36, pp : 1-12.

⁴ STIVERS R.I. 1976. *The Sustainable Society: Ethics and Economics Growth*. Westminster Press, 240 p.

Competition between EU vessels and artisanal fishing boats cause other problems, such as safety at sea. Stock scarcity and technological development have persuaded artisanal fishermen to go far offshore and fish in the same areas as the foreign vessels. Some of these foreign vessels (and also national industrial fishing vessels) illegally fish in the reputedly fish-rich coastal areas reserved for artisanal fishing. This leads to collisions between these vessels and the pirogues, which cause serious material damage and even loss of life. Responsibility for such accidents is shared since, on the one hand, certain vessels illegally fish near the coast but, on the other hand, the artisanal fishermen often, out of ignorance or neglect, do not respect the navigation rules, *e.g.* no markings or lights at night.

From the financial angle, financial counterparts for fisheries agreements are not unanimously supported, far from it. A recent EU study on "Costs and Benefits of Fisheries Agreements" (IFREMER, 1999) shows that each euro invested in a fisheries agreement generates a sales figure of three euros for the European fishery sector. For the coastal countries, this brings up the problem of the real value of the stocks procured for the European Union through these fisheries agreements.

Europe has to cope with the problem of dwindling marine resources, fishing overcapacity, a strong market demand for maritime products and the need to protect jobs in the fishery sector. Fisheries agreements with the ACP countries provide a good opportunity for the EU in this situation.

Financial counterpart payments have created serious problems ever since the coastal states have been charged with allocating them. In Senegal, for instance, the organisations that are supposed to benefit from these payments, like the Centre de Recherche Océanographique de Dakar-Thiaroye (CRODT) and professionals in the fishery sector regularly complain about delays and often not receiving the full amount due.

The positive effects of fisheries agreements on the national economies are very limited. This is especially regrettable since much of the financial gains from the fisheries agreements are reaped by a handful of individuals and by non-fishery sectors.

The lack of transparency in the fisheries agreement negotiations, the inadequate control and surveillance of fishing by foreign vessels and the need to involve all the stakeholders, including the national experts and professionals, in the negotiations decision process are problems of great immediacy. It is clear that both the artisanal and the industrial fisheries sectors will suffer if management is not improved and if the present exploitation pattern is maintained. The effects can already be felt: lower yields, unstable production levels, insufficient supply of processing plants and national markets, conflict of interest within the sector.

Despite all this incoherence, fisheries agreements bear high economic, political and, especially, social stakes for all the West African coastal states. Eliminating them in the near future would be difficult and could cause problems for the research centres and the fisheries administrations whose budgets come mainly from these agreements. Furthermore, thousands of jobs would be lost and the tuna tinning plants would have supply problems.

This gives us the impression that for the next few years, ACP-EU relations in the fishery sector will not change. It is in the interest of both parties to have these relations develop into a partnership in which the ACPs and the EU work together to protect the marine resources and promote sustainable exploitation.

2. ANALYSING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF MARINE RESOURCES EXPLOITATION

Because of the various, multi-faceted interactions between the components of the West African fisheries sector, the sustainability of fish stock exploitation cannot be examined through a "fishery system" prism (Fig. 1).

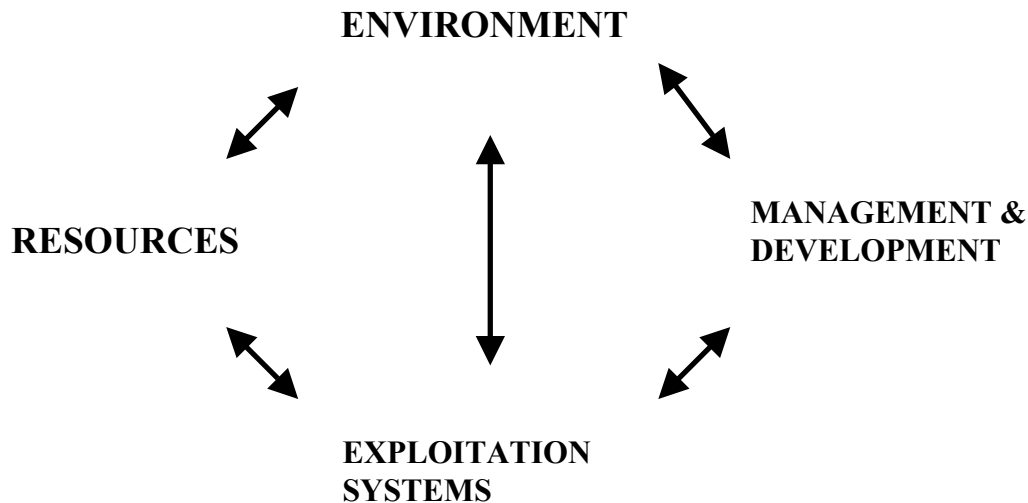


Fig. 1. Outline of fishery system

2.1. SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT

All the stakeholders (fishermen, scientists, managers, etc.) recognise that fishery sectors can only survive if the marine eco-systems, on which they depend, are healthy⁵. This means that fishery policies must make provisions for environmental protection.

Many manmade activities are threatening the marine environment in West Africa. Since populations (60% on average) and industry in most of the countries in the sub-region (for Senegal, over 80%) are concentrated in the coastal zone, pollution from households and industry can be very severe.

Fishing by EU vessels (authorised through fisheries agreements) and national fleets from the sub-region, in particular demersal trawlers destroy the marine habitat (rocks, water plant communities) thus causing harm to the fish resources. Certain artisanal fishermen blame trawling, *inter alia*, for the decline in the grouper fish stock.

The question of resource conservation and habitat were problematic during negotiations of fisheries agreements with the European Union. The last Senegal-EU agreement negotiations were an instructive example. The EU has long been trying to obtain fishing rights in the Kayar area, north of Dakar which is a reproduction area, with nurseries (especially along the banks of the trenches) and high concentrations of coastal demersals that get "blocked" by the Kayar

⁵ WALLSTRÖM M. 2000. Pêcheries et développement durable. *El Anzuelo*, vol. 6, p. 1.

trench during migration. Furthermore, by having Senegal off-phase its biological rest period, the European Union has managed to nullify attempts by Mauritania, Senegal and Morocco to schedule common periods of biological rest, and has thereby facilitated year-round fishing in the waters of the eco-region by European vessels.

During the last few years, off-shore oil prospecting has been increasing in the sub-region (Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau). Some prospecting efforts are or were carried out in protected marine reserves where, because of inadequate technological development and surveillance, the risk of serious pollution is high.

Oil prospecting causes sensitive managerial problems because the countries in the sub-region are poor and need foreign currency, which can often be obtained from oil production. In this situation it is difficult to recommend bring prospecting to a halt, despite the vital necessity to make oil prospecting and exploitation impact studies and take appropriate measures to ensure ecologically "clean" oil extraction. It would be advisable for the oil companies and the managers of the protected marine reserves to work together.

Furthermore, Senegal, Guinea and Cape Verde need to develop other protected marine reserves to complete their sub-regional system which, moreover, needs to be better managed to make the fisheries sectors sustainable. The beneficial effects of these protected reserves for the fish stocks have already been demonstrated⁶.

2.2. SUSTAINABILITY AND RESOURCES

With regard to maritime resources, the problem is the insufficient information about potential exploitation. This explains the great importance of strengthening the local capacity for fish stock evaluation. Fishing cannot be sustainable if quotas are allocated without knowledge of the available potential.

Certain stocks, especially the coastal demersals, are overfished. Energetic measures need to be taken to enable stock regeneration, *e.g.* temporary exclusion from fisheries agreements and high export duties.

2.3. SUSTAINABILITY AND EXPLOITATION SYSTEM

When speaking about the decrease in fishery resources, artisanal fishermen, fishery-related NGOs and the media often put the spotlight on the EU vessels that are authorised to fish in the sub-region in application of the fisheries agreements. They forget or play down the impact of artisanal fishing, although this sector has grown spectacularly during the last 20 years.

Unfortunately, managers and scientists have not given comparable thought and attention to changes in this activity. The result is that presentday legislation is not well adapted to the current, extremely dynamic artisanal fishing context. There are very few tools available to regulate artisanal fishing which is constantly growing and has reached alarming proportions in some countries, in particular in Senegal. This can be serious because artisanal fishermen fish in waters nearest the coast where the nurseries and reproductions areas are.

⁶ ROBERTS C.M. and HAWKINS J.P. 2000. Fully protected marine reserves: a guide. WWF Endangered Seas Campaign, 1250 24th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037, USA and Environment Department, University of York, YO10 5DD, UK, 131 p.

It is vital for the EU and the governments of West Africa to support initiatives such as the one in Kayar (north of Dakar) that seek to set up a common resource and environment system that could regulate the fishing effort.

The development of international trade is creating a strong, even alarming demand for certain species, *e.g.* shark, skate, cymbium, grouper, common sea bream, etc.

For skate and shark a sub-regional action plan is urgently needed. For the other species, stricter regulations are required.

2.4. SUSTAINABILITY AND MANAGEMENT/DEVELOPMENT

The main impediments to the sustainable management of marine resources in West Africa are:

- insufficient high quality information, in some countries, that can serve as the basis for fishery management and development;
- inappropriate legislation (centralised management with little attention to traditional practices and specific local traits);
- little involvement in the decision-making process by the local populations;
- shortage of resources for administrative entities responsible for fishery sector management and for research;
- national level implementation of sectoral policies some of which can be detrimental to marine resources conservation;
- lack of coordination between conservation efforts at the regional level although many stocks are inter-regional or have ecophases in different countries;
- poor marine resources allocation policy, especially with regard to the fisheries agreements;
- globalisation, which facilitates access to the more profitable European and North American markets, and stimulates trade in the high value species, thereby, in some cases such as shark and skate, jeopardising sustainable exploitation.

Two of these issues merit special attention, *viz.* the fisheries agreements and regional coordination of activities.

Since they cannot exploit all the marine resources in the waters under their jurisdiction, the West African coastal states are authorising foreign countries to fish in their waters, against essentially financial counterpart payments. For West African economies, which are often extremely short of foreign currency, this inflow is more than welcome.

Negotiating as individual states puts the West African countries in a weak position since the Europe Union negotiates *en bloc*. The ideal would be for member states of the Fisheries Sub-Regional Commission (FSRC) to do the same.

The WWF, the FSRC and their partners tried to promote *en bloc* negotiations but, for the time being, the diverging interests of the countries in the sub-region make this approach difficult to apply.

At workshops in Senegal and Mauritania for representatives of the West African states, the WWF, the FSRC and their partners drew up a consensual list of bottomline conditions that the states should respect in fisheries agreement negotiations. The WWF and the FSRC are urging the adoption and application of these minimal conditions for the region.

"En bloc" negotiations could boost financial counterparts and secure greater benefits in marine resources conservation. They could also serve to avoid eventual competition between the countries of the sub-region, competition which can be profitable for the European Union.

A regional approach to fisheries management and development is essential because much of the marine resources are shared and managerial problems are common to almost all of the countries in the West African sub-region, *viz.* overexploitation of shared stocks, inordinate exploitation of shark and skate because of the high value of their fins, institutional weakness of administrations and research institutes responsible for marine resources management, etc.

It is vital for the countries in the sub-region to draw up management plans that take account of the fisheries agreements. The best would be to prepare a sub-regional development plan. Failing this, it would be useful for neighbouring countries in the sub-region to consult each other when any of them draw up and implement a fisheries development plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since fishing is an important activity for many of the countries in the West African marine eco-region, countries where it plays a leading role, such as Senegal, should position it as a priority sector in national indicative programmes.

Furthermore, with the decline of the marine resources and degradation of both coastal and marine habitats, the ACP countries, with support from the EU, should create networks of protected marine reserves, intelligently selected so as to protect the reproduction and growth areas of the marine species.

Moreover, considering the numerous problems stemming from the fisheries agreements, future agreements should abide by the following guiding principles:

- respect for international conventions and codes;
- existence of a surplus not to be exploited by fishermen of the coastal states;
- inclusion of the agreements in the fisheries development plans;
- respect of minimal regional conditions concerning access to fishing areas;
- good governance of fishery sectors (priority for sustainable resource conservation and exploitation in the interest of all the stakeholders; coherent, fair, credible and transparent process for allocating resources; joint decision-making);
- utilisation of financial counterparts to strength the capacity for research, surveillance, control and monitoring and for management of protected marine reserves;
- equity for both parties to the agreements;
- scientific and technical cooperation at the regional and international levels;
- research into biological, economic and social sustainability;
- elimination of pernicious subsidies for European vessels.

Sustainable exploitation of marine resources is in the interest of both the ACP countries and the EU. Hence, future agreements should give ample importance to partnership in marine resources conservation.