

Benefits of Past Experience: Discussion

W. Royce (University of Washington). Cooperatives have frequently foundered because of the quality of leadership and I would like to ask Ms. Gibson how the quality of leadership was enhanced in Belize.

Janet Gibson (Fisheries Unit Laboratory, Belize). I am not sure that I can satisfactorily answer your question. I know that the leaders of the cooperatives were carefully chosen from the community with the help of the Department of Cooperatives, which is an arm of the government.

Richard Scully (Auburn University, with INDERENA, Colombia). Do you consider, Ms. Gibson, that a subsistence fishery where the people are also very dependent on farming, really is not conducive to fishing cooperatives. Would you generally agree?

Janet Gibson. Yes, based on our experience in southern Belize where most of the people are of Caribe-Indian background. It is a part of their culture that they carry out both subsistence farming and subsistence fishing, the latter only for their own family and friends. In northern Belize the people are different and they fish full-time as a profession.

Victor Sarmiento (U.S. AID). This question is addressed to Ms. Gibson. Do the cooperatives in Belize have some kind of professional advice? I ask because in some of the cooperatives I have seen, professional advice was almost always intermittent and the manager was one of the farmers or one of the fishermen. After a while, even in those cooperatives which initially were successful, the management deteriorated and money often disappeared and the members did not know how to handle the ensuing problems. In other cases, of course, the cooperatives were too small to have professional staff and also began to lose money for that reason.

Janet Gibson. The cooperatives do get a lot of advice from the Department of Cooperatives, but in most of the cooperatives the managers are professionals and hence they do not have the basic problem you mentioned. Perhaps I should add here that the Belizean fishermen have, on the whole, quite a high level of education, many of them having completed high school.

Arthur Lyons (Miami). Ms. Gibson, are the cooperatives limited to buying the catch only from their members or can they buy from individual fishermen who are not members of the cooperative?

Janet Gibson. They can buy catches from non-members.

Albert Jones (Miami). Ms. Gibson, I understand that the government of Belize places an annual upper limit on the catch of spiny lobsters which is in accord with the biological productive capacity of the resource. Is there any limitation on either the number of cooperatives which can come into being or the number of members of each cooperative? Also with respect to the developing shrimp fishery, is there any projection as to the number of trawlers which may be in accord with biological estimates of the size of the resource?

Janet Gibson. The annual spiny lobster quota is based on biological data. The fishing cooperatives, as far as I know, do not have any limit on their memberships and accept whomever they want.

There are six shrimp trawlers working at the moment and I know there are negotiations underway for another trawler at one of the cooperatives. I consider that the government will have to put a limit on the number of trawlers but no studies have been made so far on the stocks of shrimp. This is something that will have to be done soon.

Arthur Lyons. I have a question for Sr. Urroz from Nicaragua. What is the stage of development of the cooperatives in Nicaragua today? Do they have physical facilities under construction or are they just in the planning or preplanning stage?

J. Urroz (Nicaragua). Existen tres cooperativas funcionando con plantas físicas en tierra, además una programación está encargada de establecer nuevas cooperativas. Se está tratando así de cambiar la mentalidad de las instituciones financieras para que consideren también al pescador artesanal como sujeto de crédito. Nuestras cooperativas se dedican mayormente a la explotación de pescado; se está tratando de formar un programa integral que incluya no sólo la comercialización de la captura de infraestructura sino también la educación del pescador y del consumidor; se trata de una tarea difícil que tomará de cinco a ocho años.

H. E. Martínez (Honduras). Sr. Urroz, quisiera saber si las cooperativas pesqueras de Nicaragua tienen zonas especiales de pesca, o si pescan en las zonas camaroneras causando conflictos entre ambos sectores.

J. Urroz. No ha habido ningún conflicto entre ambos sectores debido al tipo de embarcaciones que ellos usan; el sector industrial (flotas camaroneras y langosteras) dispone de barcos que pescan más allá de las 10 a 15 millas de la costa, fuera del radio de acción de los pescadores artesanales que utilizan pequeñas embarcaciones o cayucos.

H. E. Martínez. Sr. Urroz, cuando en Honduras los barcos se acercan a una milla y media o dos millas de la costa, los pescadores artesanales reclaman tres millas en determinadas zonas. ¿Existe algo semejante en Nicaragua?

J. Urroz. En Nicaragua no existe este tipo de limitación ya que el pescador artesanal utiliza las lagunas marginales y no sale mar afuera debido a la fragilidad de sus embarcaciones; cuando el pescador artesanal captura camarón juvenil que entra en las lagunas para desarrollarse, puede afectar negativamente el recurso.

Entrevistador desconocido: Sr. Urroz, ¿qué papel ocupa o espera ocupar la acuicultura en Nicaragua?

J. Urroz. EL INFONAC está iniciando un programa de piscicultura, especialmente con mojarra, guapotes, especies de cíclido y tilapias, para más tarde llevarlo a nivel nacional; se ha terminado un estudio sobre el cultivo del camarón con proyecciones de mercado internacional.

J. Carranza (México). Sr. Urroz, ¿cuáles son los resultados económicos y sociales del desarrollo de las cooperativas pesqueras?

J. Urroz. El desarrollo logrado por las cooperativas es pobre debido a varios factores negativos como la carencia de recursos económicos suficientes y el bajo grado de educación de los pescadores que los incapacita a trabajar en equipos; además no se tiene una programación tanto nacional como internacional que suministre sistemáticamente la ayuda técnica y financiera necesarias.

Lawrence Strasburger (New Orleans). I would like to address this question to Mr. Wood in relation to the cottage industry in Trinidad. It is a well known fact that, throughout the history of the fishing industry, producers have always been able to find a market gap into which they could place any kind of product. Seriously though if your cottage industry is to remain viable it seems to me that you will have to maintain a rather strict measure of quality control. If the product is to be exported to countries which exercise strict microbiological controls it seems to me that you might be in some trouble.

H. Wood (Trinidad). The main point I am making is that you have to list your priorities in the development of a fishery. The most important thing is to catch the fish and then dispose of it; later we can start considering the refinements of quality control, management of the yield from the stocks, and those sorts of things. Development of fisheries creates fish surpluses in villages where there were no surpluses.