

Fisheries Development in St. Lucia

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RESUMEN

La pesca en Santa Lucía está todavía en sus primeras etapas de desarrollo, debido mayormente a una escasez histórica de facilidades de almacenamiento y mercadeo. Sin facilidades de almacenaje, el pescador es reacio a abandonar los métodos arcaicos de pesca, porque mejores métodos y mayores capturas no mejorarían su condición.

Así, la pesca en Santa Lucía sigue haciéndose de las siguientes cuatro maneras: (1) de corrida, (2) de cala y de masa, (3) de chinchorro y (4) la pesca del bufeo. De éstas, la de corrida es la más importante en volumen, valor y número de pescadores envueltos.

El mayor recurso marino con que cuenta Santa Lucía es el de especies pelágicas migratorias. La investigación biológica demuestra que los peces demersales no abundan cerca de la isla debido a la pequeñez de su plataforma insular. Por este motivo, la tradicional canoa caribe que sigue usándose extensamente, es también una clara desventaja. Tanto por el tamaño, como por no ser marineras, las canoas tienden a evitar una pesca más extensiva. Aún así, las canoas existentes serían suficientes para producir una captura mayor en el apojeo de la temporada de pesca (de enero a julio), si se le diera al pescador el incentivo suficiente, por ejemplo un buen precio por sus capturas.

Reconociendo estos problemas y la siempre creciente necesidad nacional por más pescado y otros alimentos del mar, se están realizando ahora mayores esfuerzos por el gobierno para proveer facilidades de almacenaje en frío, preservación, mercadeo y distribución, para estimular al pescador a aumentar su producción. El objetivo primordial es hacer de la pesca una industria económicamente viable, basada en botes adecuados y tecnología moderna y elevar, a la misma vez, el estándar de vida del pescador. La meta del gobierno es identificar, conservar y administrar los recursos pesqueros de las aguas de Santa Lucía para beneficio de los pescadores de la Isla y de la población, como un todo.

Una Asociación Nacional de Cooperativas de Pescadores (NAFCO-OP) ha sido establecida en Santa Lucía, como sombrilla para nueve cooperativas primarias. La Asociación tiene la responsabilidad de mercadear las capturas, suministrar materiales y desarrollar las sociedades primarias en conjunción con el Ministerio de Pesca y Cooperativas.

Traditionally St. Lucia's fishing industry has been like that of most developing insular countries, it just came about and grew. It was not until fairly recently, about 1968, that the government recognized the advantages of coordinating activities within the industry and providing direction for its development. Two major factors prompted the government's interest in the industry: (1) In spite of the abundance of fish in our waters our industry was small and seasonal. During most of the year almost as much fish was being imported as was caught in our own waters. (Approximately \$2 million worth of fish is imported annually, 60% is salted cod.) The resulting drain on our

economy was unnecessary. (2) With proper organization and a few changes the country could become a net exporter of fish and fish products, thus contributing to the income of the nation.

At present the fisheries of St. Lucia are still in early stages of development characterized by: (a) a large artisanal sector comprised of small boats, mainly canoes, using old established techniques; (b) a simple marketing structure involving fishermen selling their catches directly to consumers and, during glut conditions, using the medium of vendors for distribution to consumers; (c) the unavailability of cold storage facilities and a guaranteed price to the fishing community, especially during the peak catching season of January to June.

The artisanal fisheries of St. Lucia are conducted from approximately 600 boats ranging in length from 15 to 30 feet. Some 2,000 fishermen are engaged in the trade with approximately an equal number devoting full and part time.

The fisheries, which differ by area, are of four types: (1) the troll fishery, (2) the handline and pot fishery, (3) the beach seine fishery, and (4) the black fish fishery. Of these the first is the most important in terms of volume and value of output and number of fishermen. This fishery accounts for 70% of the annual landings estimated in 1980 at 3.8 million pounds. The fishing industry has historically been one where pelagic species (dolphin, king fish and tuna) account for up to 60% of the annual fish landings. Other species important in the total catch are flying fish, snappers, groupers, sharks, jacks, sardines and other demersal species.

The peak fish catching season is during the first 6 months of the year. The remaining 6 months are characterized by low production. During the glut months of the year fishermen are unable to obtain the maximum control price on fish since there is no organized marketing and distribution system for catches. Prices fluctuate from a relatively high maximum to as low as 25% of the maximum. As a consequence, expected volume of production has not increased through the years in an industry where production technology has improved, and attitude towards change has had positive response.

The increased cost of production in the early 1970s also had its effects on the industry. Gasoline, a major cost in fishing operations, increased dramatically and outboard engines which provide mobility for over 70% of the fishing fleet continued to escalate in price. Other inputs to fish production were also affected. These new factors had the effect of limiting the number of fishermen who could meaningfully engage in a fishing enterprise.

To highlight the government's early inability to relieve the new cost pressures and to contribute to change, in 1968 the staff of the Fisheries Division of the Ministry of Agriculture was one untrained Fisheries Officer who had a total budget of \$720 (EC) per annum. Indicative of the government's determination to promote development of the industry is the increase of the fisheries unit staff to the present level of: one fisheries officer, two marine biologists (local), one biologist (P.C.V.), four fisheries assistants, one diver, one fisherman and twelve statistics collectors. The increase in personnel has been matched by adequate budget to carry out developmental tasks.

The establishment of the UNDP/FAO Caribbean Fisheries Development

Project in 1966 made possible St. Lucia's participation in various deliberations on fisheries development needs in the Eastern Caribbean and eventually to attend to training programs organized for fisheries personnel and fishermen trainees. The awareness of the fisheries potential emerged as a result of interactions by personnel from the member territories of the project and further heightened the necessity for firm Government commitment towards the development of the fishing industry.

Given the existing background conditions in the fishing industry, Government decided to request the assistance of the Canadian Government through their aid agency, CIDA, to examine the fishing industry with a view to determining the needs in terms of staffing, infrastructural facilities, training and institutions which would be required to form the basis for orderly fisheries development.

As a result of this request, a CIDA team visited St. Lucia and recommended among other things the establishment of a Fisheries Complex (cold storage) which would provide a guaranteed market to the fishermen, the establishment of a Fisheries Management Unit within the Ministry of Agriculture and the training of personnel both for the Complex and the Fisheries Management Unit. The proposal by CIDA for the provision of a Fisheries Complex was seen as the hub around which the fishing industry would extricate itself from almost stagnant growth, and the establishment of the Fisheries Management Unit would undertake programs aimed at assisting fishermen through training in the use of improved fishing gear and methods on a suitable craft, marketing and distribution, processing and research.

As previously stated, it was recognized that St. Lucia's economic development depended to a large extent on the performance of its primary productive sectors. In that context and giving primary regard to the development of fisheries, a development strategy was to be implemented: (1) to provide basic facilities, particularly cold storage, in order to establish a proper marketing, distribution and pricing system; (2) to increase fish production through the use of improved technology on a suitable fishing craft, and (3) to encourage processing of fish primarily freezing and dry salting and by so doing, introducing substitutes to imported fish products.

In those early days it was the policy of Government to encourage the development of fishermen's cooperative societies, so that such organizations could provide the vehicle through which duty-free concessions on gasoline used in the fishing industry could be obtained. It was also recognized that fishermen who were also primary producers should qualify for duty concessions on engines, spare parts, fishing gear and tackle, etc. Very basic extension programs were undertaken with the fishermen but the major problems of marketing, distribution and an adequate price structure were still prevalent.

Among the recommendations made by the CIDA team, the establishment of a Fisheries Management Unit within the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries was the first to be implemented in 1976. The Fisheries Management Unit set about its task by encouraging the formation and consolidation of fishermen's cooperatives so as to gain acceptance of the fishermen for

the programs which were being developed. The last 10 years have seen the formation of nine primary fishermen's cooperative societies and the establishment of a parent organization, the National Association of Fishermen's Co-operative Society (NAFCO-OP). The National Association is charged with the responsibility of purchasing fishing inputs in bulk for redistribution to the primary cooperatives and the marketing and distribution of fish landed by members and other fishermen.

High on the list of Government's priorities was the provision of cold storage for the purchasing, processing, marketing and distribution of fish landed by local fishermen. Government has purchased and is in the process of refurbishing a facility which has a capacity of 120 tons of cold storage space. The total expenditure on this project is approximately EC\$0.25 million. This facility is expected to come on stream in mid-December and is envisaged to be operational at the start of the next peak catching season (January to June). The facility will be under lease to NAFCO-OP which proposes to offer a guaranteed floor price to fishermen for the major species taken. It is also expected that NAFCO-OP would develop local market channels as well as explore the possibility of overseas sales. It is further anticipated that NAFCO-OP will become involved in light processing for the hotel trade and will market products prepared by Laborie Fishermen's Co-operative and Goodwill Fishermen's Co-operative, which propose to fillet flying fish and engage in the salting of dolphin, respectively.

The area of training for fishermen has concerned Government as it relates to the transition to larger craft and the use of improved fishing gear and methods. At the present time the Fisheries Management Unit is not equipped to undertake a training program for fishermen. The best effort could be in the demonstration of an improved craft using some of the new technologies in fishing. As a consequence, the Fisheries Management Unit proposes to develop a training program for local fishermen so that with the assistance of an expert master fisherman/gear technologist St. Lucian fishermen would be able to receive up to 3 months' training in the use of the improved fishing gear and methods on an improved craft. It is envisaged that such a training program will encourage the youth to get involved in fishing and assist in creating a more viable industry.

The Fisheries Management Unit recognizes that improvements in fishing technology could have a significant impact on the productivity of local fishermen. In this regard, it is recognized that the craft (canoe) used by the fishermen does not fit in with these new technologies, due to the limitations of working space and carrying capacity. The Fisheries Management Unit has therefore demonstrated several boats to the fishermen who have indicated a willingness to move to a larger type craft. A limited number have even purchased pirogue-type fiberglass boats from Trinidad and St. Vincent.

At the present time a Boat Development Project is in the final stages of preparation and is expected to come on stream in the new year. This project proposes to construct one hundred (100) fiberglass boats of two designs in the range of 24 to 28 feet, which could be powered by both outboard and in-

board engines. These new boats will serve as transition crafts from the canoe and provide fishermen with much needed safety at sea while permitting them to use improved fishing gear and methods.

Basic to all other developments in the fisheries sector is the availability of a resource which could be exploited optimally for the benefit of the nation as a whole. This factor is significantly important to the fishermen who invest in boats, engines and gear for the exploitation of these resources. The Fisheries Management Unit will undertake the necessary stock assessments and surveys with the intention of advising fishermen on species and stock availability over an extended period. In this regard, the Fisheries Management Unit has initiated the collection of fish landing statistics with a view to determining the seasonal levels of various fish stocks.

The Government considers the diversification of the fishing industry and a sustained effort at production as crucial to further development. In this regard the Fisheries Management Unit is undertaking a joint project with the I.D.R.C. in the cultivation of marine algae (sea moss) in near shore areas. The Unit also proposes to extend this research work to oysters, lobster, conch and possibly the culture in cages of selected species.

To recap efforts in fisheries development over the past decade, the Government of St. Lucia sees the development of the fisherman as an integral part of the development of the industry as a whole. In this context, the provision of cold storage, processing and marketing facilities to the fishing community are seen as the hub around which the further development of the fishing industry would be concentrated. The Government also proposes to initiate training for fishermen with a view to encouraging continuity of the fishing industry, as well as providing the necessary transfer of technology to the fishing community. The acceptance of a larger type fishing craft has a base in such training being made available, since it would require modest increases in the existing level of catches for a fisherman to be in a position to purchase this improved craft.

The Government sees the extension of the EEZ as important to the development of the fishing industry and has received WECAF assistance in preparing a new package of fisheries legislation. Also of significance to the Government is the provision of surveillance over the territorial waters of St. Lucia. Discussions are being initiated in this regard. Further concern to the Ministry is marine pollution which creates problems for existing nearshore fisheries. Government proposes to take the necessary steps in creating and maintaining a least damaged environment for the benefit of St. Lucian fishermen. The Government will consider joint ventures which seek to create employment in the processing and packaging sector within the fishing industry but would also give due consideration for research and the exploitation of the marine resources of St. Lucia.