

The Fisheries of St. Lucia: A Status Report

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The fisheries of St. Lucia area still in the early stages of development. They are artisanal in nature being conducted from canoes of length ranging from 7 to 9 m. Approximately 2000 fishermen are presently engaged in the industry and it has been estimated that 50% of these are full time.

The fisheries are characteristically of four types: (1) the troll fishery, (2) the beach seine fishery, (3) the hand-line and pot fishery and (4) the black fish fishery. The troll fishery is the major income earner accounting for 67% to 70% of the yearly catch which in 1982 was recorded, at 13 major landing sites, as being 2.06 million lb.

The pelagic species (dolphin, king fish and tuna) account for 60% of the annual catch, the remainder being made up of flying fish, snappers, groupers, sharks, jacks, sardines and a number of demersal species.

Developmental Restrictions.--The fisheries of St. Lucia are in the early stages of development because: (1) the large artisanal sector comprised of small boats, the modified "carib" canoe, uses old, time-tested, and probably time-worn techniques; (2) the marketing structure is simple, in that fishermen sell their catches directly to consumers at most times, except during the glut season when catches may be sold to independent vendors and middlemen who distribute the fish to consumers; (3) the lack of large cold storage facilities and as a consequence a guaranteed price to fishermen for their fish, particularly during the peak season of January to June.

The peak season, for the first 6 months of the year, is followed by a lean season with the catches being mainly demersal species from the pot fishery. The fishing effort during the peak season is geared to the landing of the pelagic species, and it is the view in some quarters that larger quantities of demersal species could be landed during the peak season if more effort was put in that direction. However the pot fishery is practically neglected in most areas from January to June and emphasized during the latter part of the year.

During the peak or glut months of the year, prices fluctuate from the government controlled maximum prices to as little as 25% of the maximum. As a result, the expected volume of production has not increased through the years, although the Fisheries Management Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Fisheries and Co-operatives has made, and is still making, attempts geared towards increased production. These include encouraging a slow movement to a larger and more stable fishing platform, and the use of improved gear and improved methods. The

absence of a guaranteed price for fish, which would depend upon the availability of adequate cold storage facilities, has discouraged the increased production that is desired, as fishermen are of the view that greater landings would not improve their situation without proper shore based facilities. The increased effort, both financial and otherwise, would not be properly compensated for without a guaranteed average price for their catch. The result is that, although there appears to be an adequate supply of fish, St. Lucia imports annually an average of some 2 million eastern Caribbean dollars worth of fish and fish products, of which incidentally some 60% is salted cod.

Fisheries Complex.--The problem of the lack of cold storage facilities is expected to be alleviated in approximately 12 months. If completed on time, the CIDA funded Fisheries Complex will provide: fresh fish processing, 10,000 lb/day; fresh fish storage, 50,000 lb/day; frozen fish processing, 5,000 lb/day; cold storage, 1,000,000 lb/day; ice manufacturing, 10,000 lb/24 h; five insulated 0.5 ton trucks for distribution of fish and lockers for the storage of fishermen's gear and equipment.

Diversification of the Fisheries.--The diversification of the fishing industry is also seen as being crucial to the development of the industry in St. Lucia. In light of this the Fisheries Management Unit is undertaking a joint project funded by the IDRC of Canada in the cultivation of marine algae, specifically that of the genus Gracillaria (seamoss) in near shore areas. This project is seen as augmenting the existing seamoss industry as well as being another source of revenue to the fisherman who would operate cultivation plots under the auspices of his own cooperative. While the legal details of managing an area of sea bottom have yet to be worked out, interested groups of harvesters have already started cultivating plots of their own. Bearing in mind the time period necessary to produce an harvestable crop of seamoss (4-5 months), a fisherman could conceivably plant at the beginning of the lean fishing season and harvest later in that same fishing season. The profits from the sale of this crop could/would significantly supplement the income of the fisherman, especially bearing in mind the fact that the capital to put a 1-ha plot under cultivation is around EC\$12,400 (or EC\$1.4/ft²). Dried seamoss sells for EC\$8 - 10 to EC\$55 - 66 per pound (dry weight). A 1-ha plot could yield some 11000 lb (dry weight) of seamoss per harvest.

Fisheries Management Staff.--Associated with attempts at diversifying the fisheries of St. Lucia is an expansion of the staff of the Fisheries Management Unit, Government's executing agency for fisheries policy. The existing staff of: Fisheries Officer, 1; Fisheries Biologists (local), 2; P.C.V. Biologist, 1; Fisheries Assistants, 4; Diver, 1; Fisherman, 1; Statistics Collectors, 12; Mechanic, 1; Refrigeration Technicians 2; and 1 Secretary is expected to be expanded over the next 5 years to result in a structure comprised of: Chief Fisheries Officer, 1; Fisheries Officer, 1; Fisheries Biologists, 3; Senior Fisheries

Assistant, 1; Fisheries Assistant, 8; Divers, 2; Fisherman, 1; Statistics Collectors, 12; Mechanic, 1; Refrigeration Technicians 2; 1 Secretary and 1 Clerk/Typist.

Government's efforts in the fishing industry are seen as being the foundation for an expansion which would: (1) help satisfy the nutritional requirements of the state, vis-a-vis protein nutrition; (2) serve as a means of import substitution, (3) develop an export market for local fish and fish products; thus bringing in valuable foreign exchange and (4) improve the socio-economic and cultural well being of the fishing community.