

**Meeting the Training Needs of Caribbean Fisheries  
Technician Staff: A Non-Traditional Approach**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Within recent years the development of the fisheries of the Caribbean region has become a matter of higher priority than ever before. Numerous studies have been undertaken by a plethora of organizations and entities in various efforts to address this problem. It has been recognized that improved management practices are a concomitant aspect of such development.

It has also been recognized that, if developmental objectives are to be achieved, the staff of Fisheries Departments need to be adequately trained and their support capabilities improved in order that they might effectively discharge the leading roles in developing and implementing fully rationalized programs and projects.

Training has always been more readily available for higher level departmental staff than for technician grade staff. Several proposals are developed here for filling the gap which exists between the availability of training for the senior and junior grades of staff. In the past, most such proposals for technical training have tended to be along traditional lines, or, if not, then they have very often overlooked some important considerations.

**THE SITUATION**

Caribbean fisheries staff have as their primary functions (a) the support and servicing of their national fisheries, and (b) advising on the formulation of governmental policies and implementing those policies. In broad terms, this requires them to have capabilities that are managerial, administrative, technological and technical in nature; the more senior the officer the greater the emphasis is on management and administration, whereas for the more junior officers a greater emphasis is on technical skills.

Amongst senior level officers (Chief Fisheries Officers or Fisheries Administrators as they are sometimes called, Fisheries Officers and Fisheries Superintendants) their specific tasks include departmental management and administra-

tion (both operational and personnel), research and development activities, developing strategies for improved marketing, and resource management, amongst many others.

Their training to meet these needs is undertaken at overseas institutions, which is followed-up by attendance at post-graduate specialized courses and short practical training courses, seminars and workshops which help them to "get their feet on the ground." By and large, their needs in these respects are fairly adequately met.

On the other hand, however, meeting the training needs of junior grade officers (Assistant Fisheries Superintendants, Fisheries Assistants, and Fisheries Trainees) has been somewhat more problematic. Their tasks are rather more technical and skills oriented in nature and training for them is usually, though only occasionally, available in the form of medium and short duration practical courses, workshops and (sometimes) study-tours. These efforts do help to improve their capabilities, but only in limited measure, and most do not result in any qualifying awards. It must be remembered that we live in an age when both ability and qualification are essential requirements in almost every sphere of life.

Where qualifying courses for technicians do exist they are lengthy in duration. For example, at the Newfoundland Fisheries School the undergraduate diploma or certificate course for officers of this grade lasts for 3 years. As with the overseas courses for senior officers and, indeed, as with most overseas courses, these tend to be costly, both in terms of time and money. Given the parlous state of the financial and economic resources of most countries of the region, this is a serious factor. Given also the shortage of adequate staff, coupled with daily operating manpower requirements, this consideration imposes yet another restraint on the ability of countries to opt for such training courses. In the smaller island states the problem is perhaps even more acute than it is in the larger ones.

#### APPROACHES TO SOLVING THE PROBLEMS

A possible solution to this particular problem is training at home. This has several advantages, and it is sometimes less costly to the home country. The method also achieves a high level of local relevance, a quality which is often lacking in overseas training. As a form of on-the-job training, it also means that the manpower requirements of departments are not depleted to the extent that they would otherwise have been. However, such types of training can also have the disadvantages of narrowing the horizons and limiting the outlook of those undertaking them, as well as limiting their opportunities for greater personal development.

It will be readily appreciated that no one approach can satisfy the training requirements of technicians. It therefore seems as though efforts will have to be made and ways formulated, to utilize as far as possible the various forms and

opportunities for training that are available and those which should be created.

Added to this must be the realization that some types of training are better undertaken on a local basis and other types on an external basis. Efforts at home training often are beset by the lack of adequate facilities, and have been made at varying degrees of excellence.

A merging of the several available approaches would appear to be essential to this effort. But a recognition of their inherent diversities warns that any such merger would have to be highly flexible in nature and might well evade highly structured formats. However, efforts do need to be made at making all forms of training as relevant and as effective as possible, insofar as the practical requirements of the Fisheries Departments are concerned, and, at the same time, useful to the personal development and advancement of the staffs.

### CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Due consideration of the circumstances and factors surrounding these problems would seem to underscore the need to maximize training efforts. Developing schemes to achieve such objectives would therefore need to be done based on (a) the requirements of departments in terms of capabilities, and, (b) the personal needs of staffs. Fisheries technicians have often pointed, and with justification, to their colleagues and counterparts in the agricultural sector and the programs which have been developed for them at the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry, the Guyana School of Agriculture and the Regional Centre (in Guyana) for the Education of Veterinary Assistants and Veterinary Public Health Assistants. In addition, however, it must be pointed out that those institutions do not meet all of the region's training requirements at that level in those sub-sectors, and the situation will most likely be the same in the fisheries sector even after the establishment of the proposed diploma program at the University of the West Indies.

A non-traditional approach to the training of technicians appears to commend itself towards helping to fill the gaps which have been indicated thus far.

Such an approach would involve (a) some theoretical study through the extension (or correspondence) methodology, (b) practical training on site (in the form of short courses, seminars and workshops), (c) small group inter-changes (to include the format of technical cooperation amongst developing countries), and (d) both theoretical and practical training in the form of short and medium length courses in selected subjects at a regional institution; the latter two forms being particularly important to continue regional and sub-regional fisheries program development. Thus, each country should be able to maintain a focus on its particular needs without losing sight of broader objectives. Even though, as has already been mentioned, flexibility could be critical and highly structured

formats evasive, some broad areas of common weakness readily suggest themselves as being in need of special attention. These include amongst others: 1) navigation and seamanship; 2) information gathering; 3) extension techniques; 4) research support techniques; 5) supervisory management skills; 6) project implementation and monitoring.

This approach would also be modular in nature, with each effort comprising a sub-component or 'building-block' towards eventual certification. It will therefore be necessary for appropriate mechanisms to be developed to allow for the accreditation of these modules. This seems to be a role which the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries might well assume. Some indication has already been had that the University of South Carolina would be willing to cooperate in this respect. The GCFI might also need to collaborate with the University of The West Indies, the University of Puerto Rico, the Caribbean Fisheries Training and Development Institute and the Institute of Marine Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago, as well as with the Caribbean Community and Common Market and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States in seeking to bring about this recognition.

It is hoped that, at this Thirty-seventh Annual Meeting, the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute will find it possible to accept the challenge to upgrade its status and to cooperate with these various organizations in the ongoing efforts to meet the training needs and to upgrade the abilities and the prestige of the fisheries technician staff of the Region.