

No cosy relationship

Fishing agreements between the EC and ACP countries are beset with problems, as the experience of Senegal reveals

Some developing countries which are signatories to the Lome Convention and are called the ACP (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) countries have also signed fisheries agreements with the European Community (EC).

The EC maintains two types of relations with these countries in the fishing sector commercial ones through the signing of these agreements, and relations of co-operation through the Lome Convention.

This double relation poses problems of coherence in development decisions and policies since they lie across two grids of the relationship which clash at several points.

Both partners—EC and ACP—need to emphasise the importance of the fishing sector in their national economies and markets.

For the ACP countries, this sector is as, or even more, essential for nutritional reasons as for economic ones. The sector is marked by the importance of artisanal and traditional fishing, the level of technology, low initial investment and a large work force.

A typical bilateral agreement is characterised by the payment of financial compensation, to which are added dues paid directly by vessel owners who have been granted fishing licenses.

In 1991 there were 20 fisheries agreements between the EC and ACP countries. That year the EC spent 195 million ECU—more than half its budget—for fishing.

The EC wishes to increase the number and importance of such agreements since it is difficult to get into similar agreements

with other countries like Canada and the United States. Further, EC waters are over exploited, while the demand in the domestic market is only growing.

Some agreements are being currently negotiated (as with Namibia) or being reviewed (as with Senegal). These are pending the deliberations of the joint EC/ACP Commission on fishing which considers unacceptable the conditions set by the ACP countries.

Despite the importance of these agreements for both the EC and the ACP countries, it is surprising that there is a dearth of documents evaluating them. Nor is there any appropriate methodology to assess these agreements.

The experience of Senegal is typical of EC ACP fishing agreements. The first agreement with Senegal was signed in 1979, before the EC's Common Fisheries Policy.

Senegal has 47,000 artisanal fishermen. They comprise over seven per cent of the active populations and bring in more than 70 per cent of the total volume of fish caught and over half the commercial value of this catch.

Economic analysis

The Senegalese Institute of Agricultural Research in association with the Dakar Thiaroye Centre for Oceanographic Research (CRODT) attempted to assess the situation.

Its study, published in 1991, analysed the economic benefits for Senegal of agreements with the EC.

But, unfortunately, only state accounts are analysed. There is no mention of the number of jobs created, the cost of

equipment and repair, aspects of processing and packaging, among others.

On the positive side, signing these agreements helped the country's balance of payments to the tune of approximately 41 million ECU. The financial compensation by the EC represents a mere 10 percent of this total.

Under the agreement, Senegal will provide aid and subsidies to foreign owners, like a reduction in tax on marine diesel fuel (thus undercutting fuel pricing in the local market).

In 1987 these subsidies amounted to 5.5 million francs, almost as much as the sum paid by EC ships for fishing licences.

The norms for investments have been greatly relaxed to favour vessel owners who have the freedom to transfer the capital and income generated. The effect on the creation of jobs was minimal.

In 1987 the number of Senegalese sailors working on foreign fishing vessels was only 1,482 scarcely three per cent of the total number of seagoing fishermen in Senegal. Furthermore, the handling of fish landed by the foreign fleet accounts for a mere 10 percent on the activity of the port of Dakar.

There are several stumbling blocks in the path of artisanal fishing in certain ACP

countries as a result of these agreements. This is clear from Senegal's experience.

The Commission states it has not been officially informed by the authorities of ACP countries of offences committed by EC vessels. But numerous on the spot witnesses point to loss of equipment and above all, human life—suffered by small craft from collisions with foreign industrial vessels.

A recent study of CREDETIP of Senegal indicated such widespread damage 48 seagoing fishermen died on 1990-91, following collisions with industrial vessels. These collisions took place both within and outside the zone reserved for artisanal fishing.

The growing scarcity of catch forces pirogues to travel ever increasing distances away from the coast. Further, in Senegal EC trawlers and authorised to fish in a zone beyond about six nautical miles.

Taken hostage

Senegal has also seen an instance when the owner of a trawler was taken hostage after he was found fishing in a zone reserved for artisanal fishing.

Apart from his disrespect for the traditional zones of artisanal fishing, the sector is also hampered by the poor level of funding and research. Artisanal vessels are badly equipped or often not provided

at all with equipment for security and safety at sea.

Senegalese fishermen set out in undecked boats for trips lasting five to 10 days, with no navigational instruments or signalling devices. Accidents with trawlers outside the artisanal zones are often the result of this. The lack of refrigerators or isothermic cases leads to a large amount of post-catch loss. Moreover, conditions of hygiene aboard these craft are often deplorable.

The operation of industrial fleet causes over exploitation of resources. In Senegal the ratio of fish rejected to fish retained by trawlers is 2.5 in hot season and 1.6 in the cold season. This, therefore, means that at certain periods of the year, industrial fishing rejects 2.5 times more fish than it effectively preserves. A recent study by CRODT estimates that all fishing ground in the Senegalese plateau are at the limit of exploitation and there is therefore the risk of diminishing supplies.

Many ACP countries have poor means of control and surveillance to carry out regulations. In Senegal, due to the lack of official services, the traditional fishermen themselves have created look-out brigades to control the entry of trawlers into zones reserved for artisanal fishermen.

Within the framework of the fishing agreements, joint ventures have been developed in the ACP countries. The Mellick Plan envisages a reduction in fishing effort in EC waters through the transfer of fishing vessels via these joint ventures. Thus; the fishing company ACF (Armement Cooperatif Finisherien) is to receive a sum of 4.5 million ECU for transferring three trawlers to Senegal for hake fishing. This represents the equivalent of a third of the total aid paid to Senegal in financial compensation and still only covers the transfer of three vessels.

The diminishing fish resources result in considered reduced earnings for both artisanal and industrial fishermen. This, in turn, has dramatic, though little known, social results. After a trip to Senegal, the testimony of the Comite Local des Peches du Guilvinec in France conveyed the

opinion of EC fishermen. A gilt head fish bought for eight francs a kilogram from a Senegalese fisherman arrives on the Paris market costing 44 francs and Breton fishermen auction the fish at prices starting at 90 francs.

Without calling into question the use of industrial fleets in ACP countries and the foreign exchange this generates, several steps must be taken by the EC to carry along artisanal fishing in the process of development, thereby helping populations who live off the sector.

A support fund for artisanal fishing must be created within the framework of the Lome Convention. This will provide access to credit for equipment and infrastructure as well as funding for professional organisations. It is necessary to strengthen the presence and participation of professionals in defining fishing policies and notably when signing agreements with the EC.

Means of control and surveillance of foreign fleets fishing in ACP waters must be developed. Research work in ACP countries should be oriented towards the study and support of artisanal fishing. Within the framework of the Lome Convention, an observatory on artisanal fishing can be set up in ACP countries to collect data, analyses and studies aimed at decision-makers.

Other forms possible

Despite the problems that abound, examples, from outside the ACP region show that the development of the fishing sector can also come about through a recognition of the role of artisanal fishing in the process of economic and social development. It is possible to create other forms of organisations and relations different from the often too unbalanced ones prevailing in the ACP countries, which stand alone against the EC.

This piece is abridged from a study by Dominique Corlay for the Comite Catholique Contre La Faim et pour le Developpement (Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development)