



The Importance of Capture Fisheries in Food Security in Kenya

Food Security: In Kenya, the per capita annual consumption of fish is 2.8 kilograms compared to the worldwide average of 16 kg. (FAO) Fish contributes 11% of average daily protein consumption throughout the country. (ADB) Kenya has tremendous access to both freshwater, Lake Victoria, and marine fisheries; however, fish is primarily commoditized and exported opposed to used for food security at the subsistence level.

Economic Role of Fisheries: In 2005, fisheries contributed to 27.4% of the agricultural GDP for Kenya. Lake Victoria accounts for 92% of fisheries production in Kenya while marine capture fisheries consist of 4% of the total national catch for Kenya. In 2005, the gross value of Kenyan fisheries landing was US\$104,500,000 and fisheries exports were worth US\$ 49,684,000. Fishing in Lake Victoria primarily consists of artisanal fishers catching Nile Perch and Tilapia species. Marine fisheries in Kenya are separated into two categories: near shore and deep sea fisheries. Near shore fishing is conducted by subsistence and artisanal fishers while deep sea fishing is relatively under exploited due to the fact that Kenyans lack the capacity to fish far offshore; most deep sea fishing is conducted by foreign ships with Kenyan licenses. (FAO)



Job Security: Fisheries provides employment both directly and indirectly throughout Kenya. “In 2005, there were 63,000 fishers, with the sector supporting a further million directly and indirectly, working as traders, processors, suppliers and merchants of fishing accessories and their employees, and dependants.” (FAO) Historically, fishing has been an important livelihood for both males and females. Women are the primary marketers and sellers of fish throughout Africa.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper: Key to Kenya’s “Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation 2003-2007” is the fisheries sector. The document states, “Fresh water and marine fisheries have significant growth potential in improving the livelihood of communities of Western and Coastal regions of Kenya, and they are a source of foreign exchange earnings. The government is committed to

developing an enabling environment to ensure sustainability in fisheries development and management. A fisheries policy and master plan is currently under development.”

Fishery Constraints: According to the FAO, Kenyan fisheries are plagued by many issues that threaten the sustainability and biodiversity of fishing grounds as well as the ability for fish to contribute to food security. Such constraints are: lack of access to credit for fishers, lack of alternative livelihoods, and an

inability to negotiate fair wages for catches. Another major problem for Kenyan fisheries is the state of Lake Victoria. “Over 90 percent of fish is from one source, Lake Victoria. Of particular concern is the status of the fragile and heavily exploited Lake Victoria shared resources by the three riparian states: Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The evidence available suggests that production is above the maximum sustainable yield and if this continues this may lead to the collapse of the fishery. It is therefore important that the fisheries resources are managed in a sustainable manner that will ensure that the Lake Victoria fishery does not collapse.” (FAO)



The Need for Proper Fisheries Management: Kenya already has various fisheries management plans in tact such as grassroots Beach Management Units, certain season closures, and an active Fisheries Department. (FAO) However, these groups need proper training and capacity building to make their efforts more effective and efficient. Working with these groups as well as biodiversity conservation initiatives will create sustainable fisheries that have the capacity to secure access to food for Kenyans as well as protect vital fish stocks.

The Global FISH Alliance promotes sustainable fisheries and aquaculture practices through the application of a system-wide approach that balances economic, environmental, governmental, and social components essential to enhancing livelihoods and biodiversity.

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References:

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