



The Importance of Fisheries for Food Security in Malawi

Food Security: “The fishery sector provides vital and unique nutritional benefits such as protein, vitamins, minerals and micro-nutrients. Therefore, it is apparent that the sector has a significant impact on food and nutrition security especially in the lake districts. In addition, studies have revealed that fishing communities are better off in terms of meal frequency, meal composition, meal diversity, availability of household assets and the level of income with which they buy food to ensure household food and nutrition security. As a result, the sector is employing a significant proportion of the population as fishers, processors and traders enabling them to earn income for purchase of food to meet their household food and nutrition security. Households which vend in fish find it advantageous to sell fish and purchase other food items to improve their household food security and nutritional status.”(FAO)

Employment: According to the FAO, “In 2003, the fisheries sector directly employed around 62 000 people, and about 350000 people were in secondary employment. This figure includes fish farmers. About 57850 were crew and gear owners in capture fisheries. The rest were employed in fish processing, fish trading, and boat building.”



Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper: According the Malawi’s PRSP, “Fish is the single most important source of protein in Malawi, contributing about 60-70 percent of national animal protein. However, due to over-exploitation, the total production has declined by 40 percent, to 40-45,000 tons per year, from a peak in production in the early 1990s.” In acknowledging the importance of fisheries, part of alleviating poverty is focused on strengthening the fisheries sector of Malawi. “The key livelihood strategies will be to promote off-shore fishery, and local fish farming. Fisheries extension services will be strengthened and focused on the promotion of technology to increase off-shore fishery, fisheries enhancement technology and fish farming in local communities. These efforts will be particularly targeted at women. Further, efforts will be made to promote the establishment of better markets and marketing practices for fish through training in handling, processing and packaging of fish products.” (PRSP)

Rural Development: “Fish drives the commercialization of rural economies, with a multiplier effect of 1:4, between the point of production and consumption, thus improving food marketing and rural incomes. To promote rural development and improved fisher incomes, the Department of Fisheries established centralized fish landings, which were called “Fisheries Economic Centers” especially in the southern part of Lake Malawi, in Mangochi District. Fish farming in Malawi is still at an early stage of development. Currently, potential exists both at small-scale and at commercial levels. It is estimated that more than 11650 km² of land in Malawi is under or has potential for aquaculture and this is about 15 percent of the land available. There are about 4 000 fish farmers owning about 7000 fish ponds that are scattered through out the country, producing about 650 mt of fish per year (2002). The pond sizes range from 50 to 500 m².” (FAO)

Economic Role of Fisheries: “The fisheries sector in Malawi is an important source of employment, rural income, food security, import substitution and biodiversity. In 2002, fish had a beach value of about MK1.5 billion (approx. 21 million US\$), and contributed about four percent to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The fish industry supports nearly 1.6 million people in lakeshore communities and makes substantial contributions to their livelihoods, by supporting approximately nine percent, 18 percent, 15 percent, nine percent and 30 percent of the people in Karonga, Nkhata Bay, Nkhota Kota, Salima and Mangochi districts, respectively. Furthermore, 13 percent of the people in Zomba, Machinga and Phalombe districts, as well as six percent of the people in the Lower Shire Valley derive their livelihood from fishing.”

State of the Environment Report, Malawi: This report, published in 2002 acknowledges the massive decline that fisheries in Malawi has faced citing examples such as, “Per capita fish consumption is down from 10-18 kg/capita/year in the 1970s to currently 6-8 kg/capita/year; Fish production is down by



almost 20,000 tons/year from a peak in 1972; Chambo production is down by 10,000 tons/year from over 14,000 ton/year in the early 1980s; Lake Malombe’s total fish production declined from 10,000 tons/year in the 1980s to 2,000 3,000 tonnes/year in the late 1990s.” At the same time, the report highlights that the environmental degradation can be stopped and that fisheries can play a vital role in poverty alleviation. Through fish-farming, self-regulated Beach Village Communities and improved marketing and awareness campaigns fisheries once again can be a sustainable from both an environmental and socio-economic standpoint.

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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