

## Books

FISHING FOR DEVELOPMENT: SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES IN AFRICA. Edited by I. Tvedten and B. Hersoug. The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies. Uppsala. 1992. Pages 227. £ 12.95

# Don't reinvent the wheel

**Policy-makers should not ignore the traditional strengths of Africa's artisanal fisheries sector, argue the contributors to this book**

Ever since the Indo-Norwegian Fisheries Project in Kerala, India, initiated by Norway in 1952, development aid projects have been launched in many developing countries around the world.

These projects have in general turned out to be gross failures. They have often exacerbated conflicts in the inshore waters.

This volume is a compendium of papers presented at a seminar, Socio-economic Conditions for Development of Artisanal Fisheries in Africa, organized by the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies and the Norwegian College of Fisheries Science.

It provides an interesting overview of the artisanal fisheries sector of sub-Saharan Africa.

The net results of these projects in Africa are graphically summarised by Else Skjonsberg, one of the contributors to this volume: 'Defunct fish processing units, disintegrating harbours and piers, closed down workshops, wrecked boats, and non-functioning outboard engines, concrete wells from which no water is drawn and market stands that never served their purpose are dire reminders of inadequacy and wastage.

Notwithstanding most of the development assistance being given to the industrial sector and a state policy overwhelmingly in support of industrial fisheries, it is indeed significant that the

artisanal sector has continued to develop in Africa. In countries like Senegal and Ghana, for example, 'primitive canoes' spearhead one of the most important economic sectors. It is all the more impressive that the artisanal fisheries in these countries and employment, while the general economy was in decline.

In spite of this proven track record, lament the editors of *Fishing for Development*, after almost two decades of considerably costly fisheries projects, 'we still know more about the different species of fish in African waters than we know about African artisanal fishermen, both in terms of quantity, migrations and internal dynamics'.

This book tries to correct this anomaly by choosing to '...underline the opinion that artisanal fisheries are not remnants doomed to extinction', despite the expansion of 'modern fisheries'.

### Inter-disciplinary perspective

Various contributors—primarily from the Nordic countries—look at the salient aspects of artisanal fisheries in Africa, from an inter-disciplinary perspective. They explain the possible reasons for the failures of development aid projects. They also suggest conditions under which external interventions may be justified.

While the first part of the book deals with the socio-economic aspects related to the viability and dynamism of the artisanal sector, the second part focuses on failures or misconceptions of development efforts. It then discusses under what conditions artisanal fisheries can be successfully developed. In a contribution, Eyolf Jul-Larsen looks at the endogenous

conditions existing within African production systems in small-scale fisheries.

**B**ased on the migratory pattern, technological innovation, changes in the organization and relations of production, increase in productivity and output, Jul-Larsen concludes that 'West African fisheries emerge as a highly efficient and productive economic system'.

The growth of a regional market network that adapts to the rules and values of the traditional societies' has played a crucial role in attaining this efficiency.

Jul-Larsen further maintains that 'substantial economic growth does not necessarily require modernisation, defined as capitalistic relations of production', if the institutions and social regulations of the traditional societies can be extended and redefined.

Through family networks and credit-cum-marketing relationships, observes economist Jean-Philippe Platteau, the fishermen make investments in new technologies without collateral security. These traditional arrangements act as socially acceptable substitutes for collateral.

The volume attempts to explain why the fishermen resist changes that are imposed externally.

It also goes into the effect of national and international migration among fishermen, the importance of the dual economy of fishing and agriculture and the extent to which they supplement each other.

On the basis of these, Else Skjonsberg argues for transcending the sectoral approach to fisheries development, to steer away from an emphasis on biology and technology, and to understand the fishing economy, its interlinkage with other sectors and industries, before making any external intervention.

The last two papers in the book deal with resource management issues. They caution against any application of the 'Western model' of fisheries management. Ossi Lindqvist and Hanna Molsa draw

attention to how 'local cultures, languages, traditions and habits interwine in the practice of artisanal fishery' and argue for a management policy based on sociopolitical considerations, rather than fisheries biology. Adaptive management and self-management are more relevant.

Paul Degnbol goes further in his paper by making a rather radical suggestion that perhaps 'the best way to introduce management in an artisanal context may be not to introduce it at all, but to assist in creating an environment which is supportive to (sic) intentional or inadvertent management by the fishing communities'.

*Fishing for Development* goes a long way in unravelling the potential of the artisanal fisheries sector in Africa. Instead of repeatedly 'reinventing the wheel'—with disastrous consequences—this volume strongly suggests that policy-makers will benefit more by taking the 'primitive canoes' of Africa more seriously than they are often inclined to.

#### Left to itself

If you are fishing for development—in a metaphoric sense—left to itself, the chances of development of the artisanal fisheries sector are much higher than when inappropriate external interventions are made through development aid.

In comprehensible language, *Fishing for Development* quite convincingly demonstrates the strengths of artisanal fisheries and underscores the significance of this time-tested paradigm for furthering fisheries development in Africa.

This review is written by Sebastian Mathew, Executive Secretary of ICSF