

## COUNTRY PAPER 8.

### AN OVERVIEW OF THE FISHERIES OF YEMEN

The total population of the Republic of Yemen had reached 15.3 million in 1995, of which 70% lived in rural areas. The fishery sector is considered as a major one in the republic for the following reasons:

- It contributes almost half of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
- It is a basic source of generating and developing export revenues.
- It is a major source of protein for local consumption, especially for the poor classes of the population.
- It is a good source of income generation for about 350 000 people (2.5% of the population) benefiting either from the job opportunities created or through involvement in the added value activities related to services, production, marketing and preparation. This is in addition to reducing poverty in fishing villages and hamlets where most of the poor classes of population live.

The Republic of Yemen has considerable demersal and pelagic fish resources, with some of the major fish resources in the region. supported by nutrient-rich upwelling systems in the Gulf of Aden. Annual fish catches have historically varied between 80 000 and 130 000 t, of which the small-scale artisanal fleet lands three-quarters. Reports indicate that 25 000 t of high-value fish sources are caught in the territorial waters of the Republic of Yemen by licensed industrial fishing boats. During the last three decades, many studies and much research on the fish resources have been carried out along the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, although the post-1991 data are considered inaccurate, especially concerning landings in the artisanal sector. Moreover, there are no reliable studies regarding the fish sources or the fish stock. Efforts have been made to train the staff of the Ministry of Fish Wealth under the VI<sup>th</sup> Fish Project currently under implementation in the field of fish stock evaluation. However, such efforts are limited and so far have had no substantial effect.

Current annual catch levels are estimated to be 5 000-8 000 t of cuttlefish and squid; 800-1 000 t of shrimp; and 600-800 t of rock lobster.

### TRADITIONAL COASTAL FISHERIES

The traditional individual fishermen practise traditional coastal fishing using small boats of less than 12 m in length made of fibreglass or wood. They apply traditional fishing methods, and most of them land directly on the beach. The number of boats and fishermen increased at least three-fold between 1992 and 1999. This rapid expansion was the result of many factors, including:

- Investment programmes of Development Projects, Fish Credit Programmes and the successful support provided by the Agricultural Cooperative Credit Bank.
- Adoption of a number of policies and procedures since Yemen's Unity was accomplished, enabling private ownership of fishing boats, prices to be freed, and fish marketing to be freed, in addition to privatizing some public-sector maintenance corporations.

- The return of Yemeni citizens from the Gulf States after the Gulf Crisis as well as the fact that most of the individual fishermen were involved in cooperatives in the Aden Gulf area (13 cooperatives in 1993). Since 1994, 40 new fish cooperatives have been established. Cooperatives play an essential role in fish complexes where they operate activities beyond simple service provision, such as providing ice and engine fuel, and maintenance services, as well as health insurance, loan guarantees and providing a simple social security network.

## **INDUSTRIAL FISHERY**

Industrial fishery in the Aden Gulf goes back almost thirty years. It started in 1969 when the former Soviet Union and Japan operated trawlers under royalty, license and/or joint-venture arrangements. From 1974-1990, the Government of South Yemen expanded its own fleet and owned 35 vessels, ranging from 220 to 1 500 GRT, in addition to the foreign fishing vessels, which numbered as many as 45 vessels in certain years. The intensified fishing activities in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in decreased fishing catch rates along the southern coastline and considerably changed the species composition in industrially trawled areas of the deep and high seas according to the typical agreement. During the next four years, these vessels increased gradually until they numbered 124 vessels in 1998. The increase in the industrial fishing vessels was accompanied by a remarkable increase in the traditional coastal fishing boats. This situation led to an escalating struggle between the traditional and industrial fishers. The Ministry tried to treat all these issues through analysing the total fishing activities during the past period, identifying future trends and giving priority to the traditional fishing sector, which, in its turn, was in need of regulation through establishing legislation regulating activities and identifying effective monitoring mechanisms thereof.

Towards this end, the Ministry, early in 1991, instituted a number of arrangements and procedures aiming at reducing the number of industrial boats, as well as obtaining financial revenues, with a lot achieved in the past few years. The principal arrangements are given below:

- Stopping the typical agreement and replacing it with a consumption type agreement. In the new agreement, the fishing licence fees and royalties were raised.
- Expanding the protected area allocated to traditional fishing, from 3 miles to 5 miles in the Gulf of Aden, and to 6 miles in the Red Sea.
- Stopping industrial fishing in the Red Sea for four months, effective July till the end of September 1999.
- Providing 20 patrol boats for fishery monitoring and inspection. At the time of writing, half of them had arrived. Arrangements were in hand to distribute the ten boats along Yemen's coasts in order to prepare them for quick operation.
- Issuing regulations with immediate penalties and fines to punish industrial boats violating the fishing regulations applicable in the Republic.

During the second half of 1999, the Ministry started to note the fruitful results of these arrangements. The number of industrial boats decreased substantially. The number of licensed boats operating in the Gulf of Aden in the latter part of 1999 was 18 boats, and in the Red Sea, during the same period, there were only three boats.

Ministry of Fish Wealth of Yemen had planned for late 1999 a Symposium on Fishery Sector Strategy, where all parties concerned with fishery activities would be invited, in addition to international organizations and aid agencies funding fishery projects in the Republic of Yemen.

**Table 1.** Catches by major categories by industrial vessels in Republic of Yemen waters (1995 - 1998; t)

Year	Fish	Cuttlefish and squid	Shrimp	Total annual catch
1995	4 871	1 457	3	6 331
1996	8 013	1 884	0	9 897
1997	12 370	8 500	8	20 878
1998	17 100	5 010	367	22 477

**Source:** Ministry of Fish Wealth, Sana'a

