

From cash-for-access towards true partnership

Fishing is today a true global economic activity, and distant water fleets, fishing from European countries, China, Philippines etc., are competing for access to a scarce and diminishing resource. Distant water fishing is a significant way of sourcing the production lines of the processing industry. Tunas, prawns and small pelagics are often sourced by the bilateral fisheries agreements between the EU and developing countries. These agreements give rise to several questions: Who is responsible for overfishing to the expense of who? What are their impacts on local resources, economies and livelihoods?

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In 2002, the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) was reformed to include principles of environmental sustainability. This was a great success for Europe's environmental leaders and NGOs who had been pushing hard for a reform in this direction. For the first time, the CFP gives explicit reference to the reduction of fishing impacts, and to an ecosystem-based management approach (EBM) that provides for sustainable economic, environmental and social conditions. The CFP provides the policy instruments to allow for more sustainable management of Europe's seas and of Community vessels fishing in distant waters.

A part of the reform addressed the bilateral fisheries agreements. With the intention to increase socio-economic, ecologic and economic sustainability, the concept of Fisheries Partnerships Agreements (FPAs) was introduced. The European Commission ensures that the partnership agreements will promote both that the interests of the EU distant water fleet are protected and that the conditions to achieve sustainable fisheries in the waters of the partner country are strengthened. In theory, the partnership concept delivers on the demands for EU policy coherence and sustainability considerations. But in reality, is this just another re-branding exercise – or are equitable fisheries partnerships possible?

Fact: Currently, the EU has bilateral access agreements with 22 countries. The agreements cost the European tax-payers 137 million euros per year (2002). The agreement between EU and Mozambique gives access to 49 tuna vessels that are allowed to catch 8 000 tonnes of tuna for which the Community pays 75 euros per ton.

Dilemmas of partnership

When it comes to establishing partnerships on access agreements to fisheries, there are a number of dilemmas to be tackled. For the partner country, selling access to the EU is a way to secure foreign currency. At the same time, sustainable

utilization of marine resources is for many regions the only opportunity to eradicate poverty, prevent food shortage and fuel development. For the European Union, access to foreign waters is an important way to re-allocate domestic overcapacity and to secure Community employment. Given the fact that 60 percent of fish products consumed in the EU come from outside EU waters, the access agreements are a major source of raw material for the European fish producers. In theory, the introduction of Fisheries Partnership is a step forward – but will it strike a proper balance between short- and long-term interests?

True Partnership?

In order to justify FPAs, they must contribute towards sustainable development, through finding ways to sustainable use and conserve the marine resources of the third countries, to maximize economic and social benefits for the third countries and to integrate developing countries into the world economy. Obtaining such a goal demands great responsibility from both the EU, its Member States and the government of the third country. In order to promote true partnership, there is an important role for the development agen-

The benefits from exploiting the marine resources should be equally shared. An environmentally sound exploitation should be part of each partnership agreement.



Photo: WWF

cies of the EU and National Aid Agencies to play, first of all by demanding coherence between various fields of policy.

Delivery tools

Previously the financial contribution paid by the European Union for the access to fisheries was paid without obligations whatsoever. The new tools available for deliverance of partnership components and increased sustainability are joint ventures and targeted actions.

Joint Ventures are meant to facilitate transformation of know-how and technology, with the aim to secure long-term development of the fisheries sector of the partner country. Rational exploitation of tuna stocks is dependent on a certain level of technology, which is not always present in the fishing fleets of developing countries. Joint ventures are presented as a means to enable partner countries to acquire or develop a competitive fleet of tuna vessels. In reality, joint ventures are often criticized for covering the transfer or «re-flagging» of European vessels, instead of being a contribution towards developing a local fleet and industry. There is a strong need for better governance of joint ventures, they must have strict terms of references and the actual benefit to the coastal State should be assessed.

Targeted Actions: A percentage of the financial contribution paid by the European Community is earmarked to contribute towards specific issues, such as aiming to secure the sustainability of the agreements. These are called targeted actions. Each component of the targeted actions must be specified by the coastal state and the implementation monitored by a Joint Committee, where both the European Union and the coastal states are parties. The targeted actions are intended to increase the ecological, economic and socio-economic sustainability of the agreements by addressing issues like: Investment in fisheries management, improve knowledge of the fisheries, integrate coastal states in the global econo-

my, foster good governance and contribute towards development programs at various political levels. The level and purpose of targeted actions in the different agreements are not consistent. For some agreements only 5 percent of the financial contribution is earmarked whereas others reach 100 percent. Some agreements have stronger environmental components, others give priority to investments in fisheries management or poverty-related issues.

Fact: The Agreement with the Seychelles was being renegotiated during 2004. It is worth 10.4 million euros and grants access for 67 vessels to catch 138,000 tons of tuna. Under this agreement, the Seychelles authorities have earmarked 3.5 million euros for targeted actions. 1.2 million euros for the development of local fisheries; 1 million euros for fisheries control systems; 1 million euros for improving knowledge of fish stocks; and 0.3 million euros for training programmes.

Impact assessments

In order to ensure proper implementation and strive towards overall sustainability of the agreements, it is necessary to conduct evaluations or impact assessments. Such evaluations should focus not only on environmental, economic and social impacts of the agreements, but also on the opportunities which sustainable fishing provides for the partners of the agreements. The Fisheries Partnership Agreements include impact assessments. It should be stressed however, that one thing is conducting the assessments – another issue is ensuring that its conclusions are used and lead to adequate policy adaptations. Serious consideration should be given to allow the ending of an agreement when adequate compliance by the fishing industry or coastal states cannot be satisfactorily demonstrated.

Conclusion

The current state of global fisheries shows that drastic changes are needed in international policies and management to consolidate the exploitation of natural marine resources over time. An estimated 75 percent of the major commercial marine fish species are being over-fished, recovering from overfishing or are exploited at their maximum capacity. It is a shared responsibility for coastal states and distant water fishing fleets to avoid further collapses of fish stocks and to let depleted resources recover to healthy levels.

What WWF demands from FPAs

- Coherence between EU external policies towards third countries is strengthened.
- Adequate impact assessment and stakeholder involvement is secured.
- Adjust the EU vessel owner expenses to a level that matches real costs.
- Fair access to European markets is granted for fish products from developing coastal states.

Access Agreements have, by the introduction of Partnership Agreements, taken a step towards becoming a management tool with potential of increasing sustainability. If properly implemented, they have the potential of being a governance structure that can reduce the footprint of European vessels on the marine resources of developing countries and promote equal sharing of benefits from exploitation of marine resources.

A transition from heroic intentions to real change demands that both fisheries and development sectors share ambitions and priorities in their policies. Both sectors should acknowledge their mutual impacts and give priority to increasing the level of coherence regarding policies where management of marine resources is at the core. Special attention should be given to the following points:

- Increase coherence between targeted actions and development strategies;
- Secure equal sharing of benefits from exploitation of marine resources;
- Secure compliance with the Fisheries Partnership Agreements, both by the EU and the coastal states;
- Make sure that Impact Assessments carried out as a part of each negotiation process result in proper policy impact.

The European Union has introduced FPAs as a means to govern overseas fishing activities. But, if the FPAs shall be a real contribution towards achieving sustainable fisheries and not be a re-branding and legitimation for presence in southern waters, new levels of compliance and coherence are needed.

Facts: In Senegal, the first country to have signed a fisheries agreement with the EU in 1979, fisheries are very important: They provide 15 percent of national employment, yield 30 percent of export, and represent 12 percent of the GDP. Artisanal fisheries provide 60 percent of the total landings. (Source: Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements, Beatrice Gorez)

