

Trade Liberalisation and Sustainable Management of Fishery's Sector in West Africa: Case study of Gambia

The Gambia is predominantly an agrarian economy with groundnuts contributing over 65 percent of GDP. With the crippling effect of drought over the last decade, and declining animal husbandry and vegetable production, fish has become all the most important source of protein for both rural and urban dwellers and is believed to have the potential to contribute to achieving the country's greater food security policy objective and to the development of the country's economic base in general.

The small scale fisheries sector intensified its fishing of the demersal fish stocks to service the export markets. This translated into an increase in the fishing pressure on exported species. The large demand for demersal fish by the export trade has made it even more scarce in local markets.

Whereas trade liberalization had previously been seen as a means of acquiring much needed foreign exchange the environmental and natural resource impact of over fishing the source of growing concern, particularly as some of the developmental goals once associated with a expanded fisheries sector, have not yet been realized in the Gambia. The study analyzes the impact of trade policies on fisheries resource management and the evolution of cost and earnings of small scale and industrial units exploiting the resources.

The Gambian Government provides incentives (for the promotion of certain activities and exports), mainly in the form of exemptions or reductions of customs duties and internal taxes. Whilst this stimulates exports particularly of commercially high value white fleshed fish, there is an urgent need for tighter and more effective control of the exploitation of demersal resources by the industrial and small scale operators.

Exports of fish and fish products are expected to grow further with the implementation of the Gateway project and with the Gambia's eligibility to export to US markets under the terms of the under the US Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The end result is the further exploitation of the fisheries resources in the face of scarcity.

Protecting the fisheries sub-sector through tariff barriers would surely have a positive impact on the national economy, since the import of similar products would be expensive relative to domestic products.

ISBN 92 9130 071 5

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