

# **The Somali Inshore Fishing Economy. Structure, Problems, Perspectives**

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## **Introduction and Statement of Problems**

Two of the main economic objectives of development in developing countries are to reach self-sufficiency in food production and to increase exports in order to earn hard currency for necessary imports. For both the fishing economy can play an important role. Developing countries like Somalia with a long coastline are potentially in a much more favorable economic position than those states without access to the sea. The Somali coastal waters for example, unpolluted by industrial waste, are part of one of the richest fishing zones in the world and represent a very important natural resource for future development.

This article aims to describe and analyse the present situation of the Somali inshore fishing economy, to point out the specific contemporary development problems and to discuss future development issues. The paper tries to give an answer to the following questions:

- 1) Which natural, political and socio-economic circumstances are responsible for the present low standard of development of the Somali inshore fishing economy?
- 2) Why have the development measures carried out so far not resulted in a noticeable improvement of the economic situation of the Somali inshore fishermen?
- 3) What kind of development strategies and measures have to be introduced for the Somali government to achieve a marked amelioration of the living conditions and the productivity of the fishermen population in order to slow down the exodus from the remote areas and to stop the process of impoverishment of a large percentage of the fishermen families?

## **The Importance of the Fishing Economy**

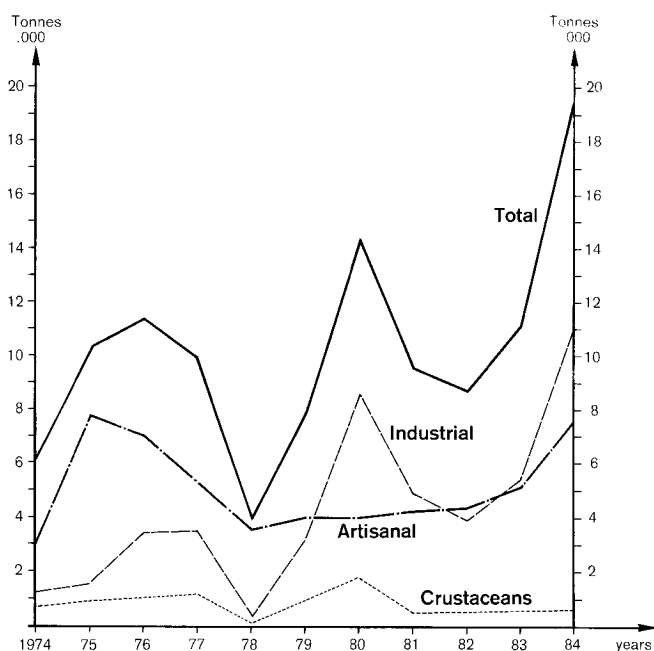
Despite the rich fish potentials, the Somali fishing economy has been of secondary importance until now. Not more than 3.9% of the total development assistance was allotted to the fisheries sector in 1985 (Ministry of National Planning 1985). Its share of the GNP had only reached a yearly average of 0.7% between 1977 and 1983. In comparison, the livestock sector had contributed 41.4% yearly

and crop production 8.7%. Following the estimations of fishery experts the yearly catch potential in the Somali waters could reach 180,000-200,000 metric tons without a danger of overfishing. At present only about 10% of this amount is exploited (Fig. 1). However, these figures may be unreliable since few or no data are available for large parts of Somali coastal waters.

One reason why fish production for the inland market is low is that in Somalia, except for the coastal zone, fish consumption has always been very unpopular. This is mainly due to the fact that Somalia is primarily a nomadic country with an abundance of fresh meat from livestock. So protein requirements could more easily be satisfied from this source.

In order to strengthen the Somali fishing economy and to raise the national demand for fish, the Somali government tried its best in the seventies to increase fish consumption at least in the large towns, mainly in Muqdishu, but with little success, in spite of prohibiting the sale of meat on two days of the week. In recent years there was a slight increase because of the higher demand for fresh fish by the quickly growing urban population and the expatriate community.

The Somali fishing economy consists of two sectors:



Design: J. Janzen 1986

Source: M.F.M.R. 1985; Fisheries Development in Somalia : 10

Cartogr.: D. Engel

#### **Production of Commercial Fisheries**

Figure 1 - *Production of Commercial Fisheries*

1) The traditional artisan inshore fishing with small boats, producing for the inland and export markets and

2) the modern industrial offshore fishing with vessels, producing exclusively for export (Fig. 1).

The formation of a Somali offshore fishing fleet in the late seventies, soon proved to be a great economic failure. The new trawlers, mainly of Yugoslavian origin, not being appropriate to the specific natural conditions of the Indian Ocean, did not work economically and the majority of the vessels were out of operation in the early eighties.

Although the modern industrial offshore fishing which is at present carried out mainly by a number of foreign vessels has increased its contribution to the country's total fish catches in recent years from about 3,904 tonnes in 1982 up to about 11,363 tonnes in 1984, the sector of artisanal fishing is still more important for the country, although it officially produced only 7,724 tonnes in 1984 (Fig. 1). Real production seems to be considerably higher. As no exact data are

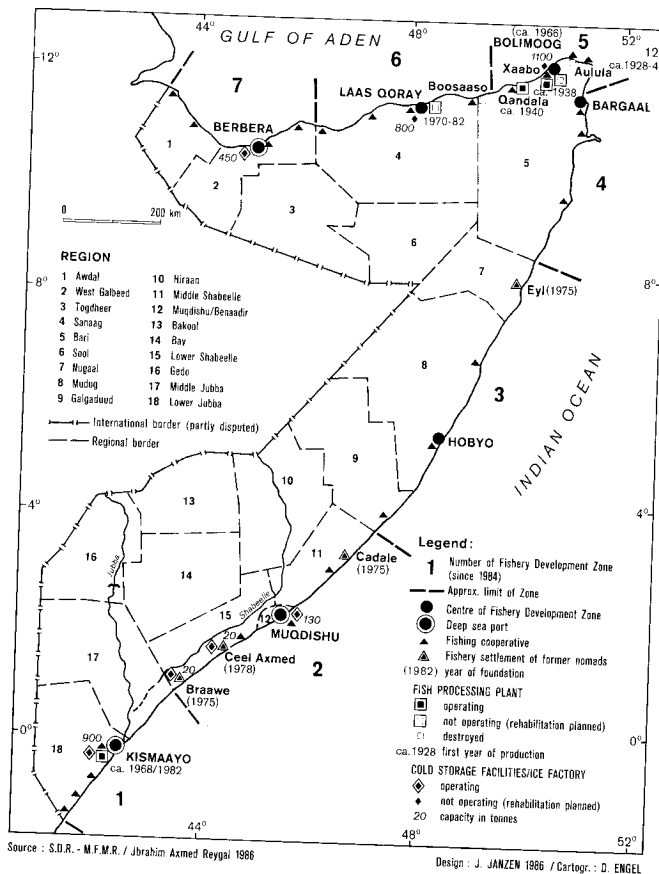


Figure 2 - Fishery Development Zones in Somalia and Infrastructure



Figure 3 - *Xaabo*: Typical fishery settlement of NE-Somalia. The fishermen use traditional wooden craft and simple fishing gear (background). (All photos by J. Janzen, March 1984 and January 1986)



Figure 4 - *Qandala*/NE-Somalia: Sharks constitute a major part of the catches.

available about the subsistence consumption of the Somali fishermen as well as the amount of smuggling, precise figures about the total fish production of the inshore fishing sector cannot be obtained.

## The Inshore Fishing Sector

### a) Fishermen Population

According to estimates there is a coastal population of between 76,500 and 90,000 people living in about 30 larger coastal settlements (Fig. 2 and 3). For most of them fishing is a major source of income. Besides an estimated number of 3,500-4,000 fulltime fishermen there are about 10,000 occasional fishermen (S.D.R./M.F.M.R. 1985b: 3) who are also engaged in other economic activities such as livestock rearing, frankincense gathering, gardening and trade.

The sedentarisation of approx. 15,000 former nomads in four fishing settlements between 1975 and 1978 (S.D.R./M.F.M.T. 1976a-c) has been an economic failure. Due to cultural alienation, lack of attractive income possibilities, capital for investment, mismanagement etc. the majority of the former nomads left the new settlements in order to look for other more profitable income sources (Haakonsen 1979; Janzen 1984; Labahn 1982). Nowadays only a relatively small number of former nomads is really engaged in fishing whereas the majority has returned to pastoralism or started a life as migrant workers in either Mogadishu or the Arabian Gulf states. The population of the fishing settlements consists mostly of women and children.

It is also a general feature of the other Somali coastal settlements, especially in the remote areas, that the population has shrunk considerably during the last 15 years, looking for new employment in the big towns or abroad.

### b) Natural Conditions

Artisan fishing is carried out all along the Somali coastline of approximately 3,300 km, bordering the Gulf of Aden in the north and the Indian Ocean in the east (Fig. 2). The climate in the coastal zones is hot and humid. During the period of the SW-Monsoon (June-Sept.) fishing is impossible because of the rough sea. During the rest of the year conditions are very favorable for fishing.

Along the coast an abundance of different species of fish is available. Various kinds of fish such as tuna, mackerel, white fish, sharks and lobsters are of great economic importance (Fig. 4).

### c) Economic Structure and Development Problems

The somali inshore fishing sector is hardly modernized. The fishermen mainly use simple traditional fishing equipment, consisting of handlines and small nets. Besides the small traditional wooden craft (sing.: *huuri/beden*) they have also been using larger motorized boats (sing.: *laash*) since the early seventies (Fig. 3, 4 and 6).

In 1984/85 the Somali inshore fleet consisted of 891 traditional *huuris* (rowing-boats), 176 traditional *bedens* (sailboats) and 354 *laashes* (motorized boats). The latter are mainly of a boat type, called «GRP», which is produced in Mogadishu.

Whereas the traditional crafts are concentrated along the coasts of the Bari and Sanaaq regions, the modern types of boats are mainly to be found on the coast of the more densely populated southern Somalia.

The main objectives of the Somali fishermen are to produce:

1. enough fish for their own consumption (both fresh and dried fish/*xaniidka* (Fig. 5),
2. fresh and dried fish for the local markets,
3. dried fish for export (especially shark/*libaax*, Figg. 4 and 5),
4. special kinds of fresh fish for the canneries (tuna and mackerel) and the cold storages for the national market and for export in particular.



Figure 5 - Boosaaso/NE-Somalia (Fishing Cooperative): Large quantities of fish are salted and dried. Shark fins (foreground) gain the highest prices.



Figure 6 - *Xaabo-Fish Factory*: The canned fish production is mainly exported to Italy. The old equipment only allows a partial utilization of the potential capacity.

Since the early seventies most of the fishermen are at least nominally organized in cooperatives which have theoretically the purpose to provide them with basic facilities like loans, fishing gear, boats, spare parts, fuel, food stuff, marketing possibilities, training programmes etc. But the assistance really available to the fishermen so far is still very limited in most parts of coastal Somalia. Especially in the remote areas there are only very few government facilities available, and so only a small part of the huge fish potential of the Somali shelf zone is exploited. Another big problem is the poor accessibility of most of the coastal areas of Somalia which makes the marketing of fresh fish very difficult. Consequently most of the fish, especially sharks, are salted and dried (Figg. 4 and 5). Another significant hindrance to increasing fish production is the low sale price, which the fishermen get in the cooperatives and the fish factories. The prices for 1 kg of fresh fish in Xaabo and Qandala fish factories varied between 2-7 Somali Shilling (So.Sh.) in January 1986. Private sales prices in the markets however, being 20-30 So.Sh. per kg at that time, were much more attractive for the fishermen.

In order to obtain higher producer prices than the cooperatives and the fish factories are offering, the majority of the fishermen prefer to sell as much as possible of their fresh fish catches in the markets. They try to sell their dried fish production to private Somali and foreign merchants once or twice a year. Most of this production is exported to Kenya and to various Arabian countries. Unknown quantities are smuggled by dhows.

In some areas of the Somali coast such as parts of Bari, Sanaaq and Lower Jubba the fishermen are in a more favorable position than their fellow countrymen in other coastal zones of Somalia, because they can sell their catches to the fish factories in Kismaayo, Xaabo, Qandala as well as Bolimoog and Lass Qorey (Fig. 2). The last two have not been functioning for the past few years mainly because of lack of spare parts, capital, mismanagement and marketing problems. In Qandala and Xaabo fishcanneries (Fig. 6) only a small percentage of the production capacity is exhausted. This low productivity is mainly due to the use of old machinery and the other problems already mentioned above. The new modern fish processing plant in Kismaayo, in contrast, has a high production output but it is suffering from a lack of marketing possibilities (S.D.R./M.F.M.R./S.M.P. 1985).

In conclusion it can be stated that the low prices offered to the fishermen for their catches from both cooperatives and fish factories, the lack of communication and marketing services, the introduction of new expensive boats of the GRP-type and other modern boats without providing sufficient spare parts, fuel, maintenance and training facilities, at the same time have not contributed much to the development of the traditional artisan inshore fishing sector of Somalia in the past.

### **The Government Development Programme**

#### *a) Development Targets*

In order to improve the economic conditions of the Somali fishing economy and reduce the regional economic disparities, the «Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources» set up a broad programme of development in 1984/85. For administrative purposes the Somali coast has been divided into fishing development zones (Fig. 2).

The most important points of this plan for the coastal areas of Somalia are:

1. to improve the physical/technical infrastructure (supply of water and electricity, construction of jetties and roads, transport facilities etc.);
2. to improve the social infrastructure (construction of schools, health centers etc.);
3. to increase the possibilities of marketing for both fishermen and factories;
4. to ameliorate the provision of food staff and fuel;
5. to introduce new fishing equipment and training facilities for the fishermen;
6. to modernize and rehabilitate the existing fish factories, and
7. to repair the old and construct new coldstorage facilities (S.D.R./M.F.M.R. 1985: 11-16).

How these ambitious plans can be put into practice is still an open question. The development aims can hardly be realized without extensive development aid and a strong commitment by private investors.

#### *b) New Fisheries Development Projects*

A large number of new fishery projects are planned for the near future. Some have already started recently. The most important projects for the inshore fishermen are:

- 1) The «North West Inshore Fisheries Project», based in Berbera;
- 2) The «North East Fisheries Development Project» (NEC-Fish), based in Bari and Sanaaq Regions;
- 3) The «Somali Marine Products Project» (S.M.P.), based in Kismaayo and
- 4) The «Berbera Cold Storage Project» (Fig. 2).

All these projects aim to rapidly improve production conditions for the inshore fishermen.

Through the construction of workshops, training centres, ice-factories and deep freezer storage facilities as well as the provision of soft loans for the purchase of new boats, spareparts, fuel, food etc. in a few places on the Somali coast, the economic and living conditions of the inshore fishermen in these areas are about to be improved step by step.

Finally it should be mentioned that the construction of a new tarmac road and the ongoing improvement of the road network of the Bari Region, will have positive consequences for the marketing of fresh fish from Boosaaso and the isolated area around Aulula near Cape Guardafui (Fig. 2).

### **Development Perspectives and Recommendations**

In the planning and implementation of future development measures for the Somali fishing sector special attention should be given to the following points:

1) The main target group for development measures in the Somali fishing economy should be the local fishermen. The improvement of their living, working and income conditions should be the main aim. In the past, too much attention has been paid to costly big projects like the expensive offshore trawler fleet.

2) An important prerequisite for a successful development of the inshore fishing sector is investment from both foreign and Somali businessmen and companies. In order to prevent increased onesided dependence on foreign countries it would be much more beneficial to the country's development if private Somalis would invest much more than in the past. In order to encourage such investments the government has to create a favorable climate for investors. That means, that legal security has to be improved and people willing to invest in this productive sector should be given preference by the government.

3) The process of privatization and liberalization has to be enforced. The negative image of the fishing cooperatives as place where the fishermen can only sell their catches for unattractively low prices, has to be changed. The concept of the fishing cooperatives has to be altered to exclusively marketing and service cooperatives, offering the fishermen all kinds of necessary facilities, in order to increase productivity. Furthermore the costs for administration as well as other expenses within the cooperative movement have to be reduced and higher producer prices be offered to the fishermen.

4) As Somalia herself only represents a limited market for increased fish production, special efforts should be concentrated on the increase of export of canned and deep frozen fish. Especially in the Arabian and European countries, but also in other African and Asian developing countries, Somali fish products could find a profitable market. But in order to be able to compete with other countries

on the world market the quality of Somali fish products still has to be improved considerably and detailed marketing studies have to be carried out.

5) Ambitious economic aims should not let those responsible neglect the conservation of the natural environment. The fate of the water turtles (Fig. 7), for example, which have been heavily decimated in large parts of the Somali coast, should be a warning.

6) Parallel to these measures intensive scientific research has to be undertaken in order to obtain a solid data basis for future planning and to protect the Somali fishing resources from possible damage through over-exploitation.



Figure 7 - A Beach near Ceel Axmed/S-Somalia: Dying sea-turtles. Preventive measures have to be set up for the protection of this menaced species.

It remains to be hoped that at least some of these recommendations will be implemented in this way, the previously neglected inshore fishing sector might make an important contribution to the diversification and strengthening of the Somali economy in the future.

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