

# The role of Mediterranean small-scale fisheries in a context of new development strategies

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Seafood products are among the most traded food commodities in the world. Developing countries and poor populations particularly benefit from their trade. In the Mediterranean, fish resources are the basis of economic and cultural fabric composed mainly of small-scale and labour-intensive businesses, which play a fundamental social role in their areas of activity. In the Mediterranean region, approximately 54 000 vessels and 137 000 fishers are involved in small-scale fisheries representing an important share of the regional fisheries economy.

Their very existence is threatened by the depletion of Mediterranean fisheries and by the globalization of the fisheries markets. It is therefore crucial to recognize the contribution of small-scale fisheries to poverty alleviation, local development and food security in the global agenda. In this perspective, given that 2014 was declared the “International Year of Family Farming” by the United Nations, it would have been more appropriate to combine the concept of “family farming” with that of “family fishing”.

A clear definition and identification of small-scale fisheries, however, are never an easy task. In fact, the characteristic features of this fleet go far beyond the pure technological elements of production. From this last point of view, only a few attributes can be recognized as commonly widespread, while many others, including the fish species involved, the vessels, the fishing methods and the management approaches vary widely even within particular regions. For example, more than 50 gears do exist worldwide and, depending on the situation, small-scale fisheries are well-known for being either very selective or multispecific. Probably, one of the few common characteristics of small-scale fisheries is the small size of vessels, although it is not easy to determine a clear limit, and similar attempts, such as the sharp 12 m length limit established in EU Regulations, have normally generated criticisms from fisheries’ associations. Probably, even more important than physical characteristics, are socio-economic features for outlining small-scale fisheries. These, in fact, typically rely on a family-based structure, people are involved in part-time or seasonal fisheries activities, capitalization of the business is very low, and products are often sold directly on landing beaches and ports for local markets (although cases of products with export relevance do exist).

For these reasons, policy and development themes of small-scale fisheries, apart from the classical issues regarding fisheries resources and management, should focus on people and communities, including specific themes such as nutrition, food security, poverty, gender, migration, microfinance and any other public service or infrastructure improving the conditions of life for coastal populations.

These are huge themes that cannot be approached without the ac-

tive participation of communities. To be more precise, actions should be aimed to community empowerment encouraging, and developing the skills for self-sufficiency, with a focus on eliminating the future need for external aid in the individuals of a group. It is to notice that whether several development objectives can be obtained through the involvement of an external (institutional) actor which directly provides a new (or improved) service or issues a rule, or some new infrastructure, only an empowerment approach provides the stakeholders with the education, information and know-how needed to understand which improvement is needed and the capacity to realize it.

True involvement of coastal communities can be achieved for different purposes and with different tools of cooperation. At least three typologies can be highlighted: participation of fishers in the co-management of marine resources and fisheries; horizontal and vertical organization for the processing and sale of fish products; and broader partnerships with public authorities, civic society and enterprises for the implementation of development projects.

Co-management has a long and well-known history in the Mediterranean Sea as attested by the experience of Cofradias in Spain and Prud’Hommes in France. Several new forms of co-managements have been recently introduced in national and regional legal frameworks, but it is important to distinguish cases where fishers’ organizations have a true role in decision making and a delegated responsibility in management, from cases where there is a simple consultation mechanism. On the other hand, introducing co-management responsibilities in areas where management has been traditionally centralized and where there is no practice in cooperation can be a hard task. This entails a long process in order to identify local leaders and build social capital, and incentives and continuous monitoring are needed.

Similar problems are normally found even when institutions intend to promote business cooperation, a collaboration between people to raise the common competitiveness. The general objective of these strategies is to lead to lower costs and higher efficiency; customer expectations can be met more easily; synergies are generated in order to pool resources, and to share strength and know-how; stability and sustainability of market are gained. However, even in this case, training and capacity building are very important steps, since short-run commitments may appear, to potential participants, too severe compared to expected long-term benefits, and benefits can be judged to be uncertain due to free-riding behaviors; similar uncertainties can make the startup and success of such collaborative forms very difficult.

Finally, broader partnerships with public authorities, civic society and enterprises are interesting solutions for the implementation of development projects. This tool has been strongly incentivized by the European Union with the last European Fisheries Fund, fol-

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lowing the experience of the Leader area-based approach used for the development of rural areas. The central principles of this approach are driven by the diversity of fisheries areas and situations that exist throughout the EU (which entail different solutions for different problems), and by the concept of subsidiarity, which ensures that decisions should be taken as closely as possible to the citizen. In other words, local actors are required to create a group charged with implementing an integrated local development strategy for a coherent territory, based on a bottom-up approach.

This larger approach addressed to the development of coastal areas should not disorient pure fisheries experts. In fact, on the one hand, fishers are people as other, and their general well-being does not depend only on fisheries results, but it is linked to the access to a wide series of services including markets and credit but also health, education, infrastructures, etc... On the other hand, fishers represent the key stage of a supply chain connecting other sources of employment and income, such as net and gear making, ice production, boat building and maintenance, engine repair, fish processing, packaging and trade. Finally, fisheries should also be considered under the multifunctionality perspective, in other words as a source of non-trade benefits, that is, benefits other than food production.

Multifunctionality is a quite new concept in fisheries. The key elements of multifunctionality, taken from the agriculture discussion, are: the existence of multiple trade and non-trade outputs that are jointly produced; and the fact that some of the non-trade outputs exhibit the characteristics of externalities or public goods, with the result that markets for these goods do not exist or function poorly. In addition to food production (which is the trade output), non-trade output of fisheries can include: environmental functions (small-scale fisheries are often linked to positive externalities, or reduced negative externalities, on environmental issues), territorial functions (small-scale fisheries allow the monitoring of the sea, preserve cultural tradition, attract tourists) and social functions (they concern impacts that help improve the local quality of life in coastal communities, including employment and reduced emigration rates).

Following the example of agri-environmental measures of the Common Agricultural Policy, it could be argued that fishers could be rewarded for using less intensive techniques and protecting the environment. However, until now, it seems that these arguments have not found large consideration. In France, for example, the government introduced in 2008 the Blue contracts (*Contrats Bleus*) in order to encourage a more sustainable and responsible approach to fishing. Within this framework, vessels are compensated for undertaking certain measures that contribute to a more sustainable fishing or to the protection of the marine environment. Measures included in the blue contracts fall into three categories: partnerships between fishers and scientists; adoption of more sustainable fishing practices; environmental protection, such as clean-up activities.

Excluding these isolated initiatives from public authorities, diversification is normally considered as the only private possibility for fishers to increase their revenue by internalizing the positive externalities of fisheries; diversification also allows fishers to appropriate the profits usually taken by other actors operating in other stages of the supply chain. With this term, in fact, several strategies can be considered, mainly included in two categories: pluriactivity, whereby fishers and their families continue to obtain some income

from fishing but also carry out complementary activities, such as tourism; and diversification of activities within the fish value chain, such as processing and direct sales.

It is impossible to identify one development strategy that is applicable for every situation because small-scale fisheries are much differentiated, and much differentiated are also the natural and economic characteristics of coastal communities and marine areas. For these reasons, it is so important to stress again the relevance of empowerment and bottom-up approaches. Thus, States and international cooperation should foster these strategies. International cooperation is not new in fisheries. Fish stocks are common goods and, in most cases, they are shared between different national waters, so that collaboration has a long tradition on this theme. Now, it is necessary to spread this form of natural cooperation toward the social and economic dimension of fisheries and coastal development, in order to permit that the exploitation of these common goods have the maximum welfare impact for local communities, which should be the main beneficiaries of marine resources.

In this context, CIHEAM has always pursued the goal of bridging the information gap not only between countries but also vertically, i.e. between local stakeholders, researchers and decision-makers in order to promote cooperation. Over the last few years, the activities developed by CIHEAM in the Mediterranean fishing sector have involved international and non-governmental organizations, national institutions, research institutes and professional associations in Mediterranean countries, and this has enabled to identify the needs for a common growth of the sector. Through several projects (e.g. PESCAMED, FISHINMED, READYMED-FISH, NEMO, PESCA LIBANO and others), CIHEAM persevered to develop networks for the exchange of good practices and information, to improve the skills and professional expertise of public and private operators involved in the management of marine and coastal resources, and to support fisheries through diversification and the development of multifunctional activities.

The sustainability of fishery resources and their contribution to food security and nutrition depends on the quality of their control and the stability of management policies. Hence, the need for strategic Mediterranean cooperation, especially between the northern and southern shores where the realities of the sector are rather contrasting. The differences in the structures of supply and demand, in the social, technical and organisational contexts of fisheries production as well as their asymmetrical consequences on food security and poverty alleviation must be considered. These issues are at the core of the debate related to "Blue Growth" and "Blue Economy" in the Mediterranean Region. We need to remind that the Sea remains a strong resource for nutrition and employment but also a major field for innovation.

Cooperation for the protection of marine and coastal resources, the sustainable management of fisheries and the socioeconomic development of coastal communities are tools that can help different countries move towards the implementation of common strategies shared at the Mediterranean level. Objectives of sustainable development, poverty alleviation and food-security need a common involvement of all Mediterranean countries, even if local solutions can follow different paths through a bottom-up approach. This inevitably involves an integrated approach that combines environmental protection (sustainability of fish stocks) with the social cohesion of coastal communities.