Declining Commercial Fish Catches in Lake Victoria's Winam Gulf: The Importance of Restructuring Kenya's Aquaculture Programme.

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Abstract

The total weight of commercial fish (metric tons) caught in the Winam Gulf area of Lake Victoria in Kenya declined from 3300 mt to 760 mt between 1995 and 2009. Associated with this decline, and ranked in descending order, the species richness of the commercial fish catch was limited to seven major groups (Rastrineobola argentea; Lates niloticus; Protopterus aethiopicus; Labeo victorianus; Haplochromis species; Clarias gariaepinus; Bagrus domac). Numerous hypotheses ranging from eutrophication, inadequate control of the exotic water hyacinth and overfishing were advanced to explain this decline. The Kenyan government, working in partnership with international organizations, implemented multiple restoration and management programmes in response, including aquaculture. Unfortunately, success for this implemented programme has been very limited because important socio-economic driving factors were overlooked. To provide a better understanding of the issues, 150 members of the Winam Gulf fishing community, ranging in age from 20 to 40 years, were surveyed. The results of this survey identified poverty and inadequate education as two major issues requiring substantial attention. The survey also suggested that if societal changes are to occur, it will rest upon changing the beliefs of the youth in the Winam Gulf area. Restructuring Kenya's aquaculture programme, with a focus on the youth, provides a pathway for increasing the literacy level of the community, as well as for reducing poverty.

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