



FISHERY COMMITTEE FOR THE EASTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC (CECAF)

WORKING GROUP - ASSESSMENT OF SMALL PELAGIC FISH OFF NORTHWEST AFRICA

IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON SUB-REGIONAL FISHERIES

This information sheet recounts the discussions at a digital preparatory meeting for the CECAF small pelagics assessment Working Group, sub-group North from 22–26 February 2021. Notably, country highlights on the implications of COVID-19 on sub-regional fisheries were discussed. These observations include:

The Gambia

Due to the impact of the COVID-19, artisanal fishermen could not sell their catches, which resulted in economic losses for the fishers. Fish processing units (including fishmeal factories) also scaled-down their operations, and many of the staff did not work during this period. The pandemic resulted in a shortage of fish due to Senegalese fishers who normally access parts of Gambian waters for fishing were prohibited from entering. The industrial sector has also received fewer license requests. For the export sector, closure of the transportation routes disrupted and broke the link between supplier and consumer, especially for regional and international markets, thereby depriving fishers of that stream of income. Fishing effort has fallen as demand declined and the need to observe physical distancing at sea has affected many fishermen, coupled with a collapse in demand from restaurants, hotels and catering, and the restriction of open markets for fish meant fishers seeking alternative means of livelihood. There was also a labor shortage in the most productive sector in the northern zone of Gambia where the majority of fishing activities is dominated by foreigners who come from neighboring countries and need to cross the border. Unemployment in the fishing sector has gone up and the livelihood support system is no longer able to maintain every actor in the value chain. However, fisheries data collectors maintained their presence at major fish landing sites to collect catch and effort data.

Mauritania

Fishermen fished less which resulted in less pressure on resources, in particular cephalopods. Fishing of small pelagics continued, mostly for processing activities. It should be noted that market destinations changed to be more locally focused (e.g., local markets), or regional (e.g., neighboring countries). This change in market direction is a result of the pandemic because of the transborder restrictions put into place between countries. The true impact of the pandemic has not yet been quantified. Fisheries data for 2020 is expected to reveal the extent of the impact of COVID-19 and its restrictions on Mauritanian fisheries.

Morocco

Since March 2020, domestic fishing activities have been impacted due to the protective measures against the spread of COVID-19. Coastal fishing has been impacted more than offshore industrial fishing, but the decline in coastal activity has been offset by improved fishing yields in some other fisheries. Provisional statistics for 2020 show a 5-7 percent drop in catches; no export data is available yet. Furthermore, Ramadan occurred in March 2020 and the government authorities focused efforts to make fish available to the local markets. Most research surveys at sea were disrupted and/or suspended, but the major surveys were still completed. Therefore, survey data was not majorly impacted.

Senegal

The pandemic has had a major impact on artisanal fishing. Free movement of fishermen, access to landing centers, fluidity of regional transport systems and disrupted airports are among the services that have been affected. Curfews also disrupted fishing activities. The processing and fish trade segments were the most impacted by the reduced fishing activity; which in turn has disproportionately affected female workers in these activities. The national research center was also closed for two months for teleworking, but this did not affect data collection activities as the field staff were unaffected, except for tuna fisheries, as access was prohibited for sampling.

