

# Country Update

## WTO Fisheries Negotiations: Main Issues and Interests of the East African Community (EAC)

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### Introduction

Rwanda is a land-locked country with an estimated population of 12 million and a surface area of 26,338 sq. km of which 1,390 is water surface. There are 24 lakes including three shared lakes (i.e. Kivu with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Cyohoha and Rweru with Burundi). Rwanda fishing is mostly done on Lake Kivu and the rest of the fish comes from smaller lakes such as Lake Muhazi, Lake Mugesera, rivers and swamps. According to the information (statistics) provided by the Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB) on the institution's

official website, the national fish production is estimated at 26,732 tons (2015) of which capture fisheries contribute 25,159 tons and aquaculture 1,573 tons. *Rwanda is currently by far a net importer of fish* from neighboring Uganda and Tanzania. However, it is important to note that Rwanda also *re-exports* most of the imported fish to the DRC. Fisheries and Aquaculture sectors provide about 200,000 jobs (both direct and downstream jobs) though it is not a traditional enterprise. On the whole however, fishing in Rwanda has remained artisanal characterized by smallholder fishers and farmers. The fishing sector which is managed

largely through local governments and cooperatives falls under the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI). Fish production figures are still low and the country imports fish mainly from Tanzania and Uganda to meet the domestic demand.

Surface water bodies in Rwanda occupy a total of 135,000 Ha which is 8% of the country's surface area which includes 101 lakes totalling 1,495 km<sup>2</sup>, 861 rivers totalling 6,464km. There are several minor lakes and many rivers, floodplains and swamps all of which are critical fish breeding and nursery grounds. It is reported that fish production and consumption in Rwanda is comparatively still at low level. The level of per capita fish consumption in Rwanda estimated at 1.5 kg is the lowest in East Africa and falls far below the Sub Sahara Africa and global level estimated at 6.7. Local market for fish products is guaranteed as fish has remained on high demand compared to the supply. Currently one kilogram of fish costs about US \$3 while the fish fetches better prices in the export market. The prices of fish in the local market have been on the increase for the last twenty years and the trend is likely to continue for some years.

With the projected 16 million people by 2020, the country will need 112,000 tons of fish annually if the population is to catch up with the average fish consumption in Sub Sahara Africa. Artisanal fishing has been practiced in Rwanda for decades by small fishers and farmers, with increased value of fish over the years, there has been increase in fishing capacity along with fishing malpractices leading to overfishing in all the waters. The

government through relevant institutions like the Ministry of Agriculture is working with the Rwanda Cooperatives Agency to reach out to fishing cooperatives and others in the fishing business to apply best practicing in an effort to ensure sustainable development of the fisheries sector.

In light of the above therefore, it is right to state that Rwanda Fishing is mostly practiced in Lake Kivu and also some of the small lakes that are present in the extreme interior part of the country. These include Lake Muhazi and Lake Mugesera. Another notable characteristic is that Rwanda Fishing in most cases is for the purpose of self-consumption and mostly carried out by cooperatives. Fisheries cooperatives are those cooperatives that enable their members to manage fish farming assist members with purchase and maintenance of fishing equipment, market fish and enable fishermen to save money regularly and borrow through loans as needs arise.

## **Challenges Faced by the Fisheries Sector in Rwanda**

It is right to say that the fisheries sector has not yet contributed much to Rwanda's GDP and is indeed a sector that is yet to be developed. It has been argued that the reason is due to inadequate replenishing of fish in the lakes and a resultant low output. Looking at the current realities, it is evident to observe that the fisheries and fish farming industry in Rwanda are still facing some challenges for the sector to develop at its full potential.

Among the challenges, the most obvious ones include the following; inadequate management

capacity in terms of organizational structure, technical capacity, and logistical support which has resulted in increased depletion and degradation of the fisheries resources as well as disjointed and unsustainable aquaculture development efforts. The capture fisheries production remains the major supply of fish locally but has reduced over years and currently provides about 1.28 kg of fish per capita annually. Again, despite the enormous natural and socioeconomic potential, historical and current public sector interventions coupled with current overwhelming national and individual farmer interest for development of aquaculture, the sector remains extremely underdeveloped with minimal contribution to the national fish harvest. However, another visible reality that is also a challenge in its own nature is the lack of modernization of the sector nor the application of relevant up-to-date technologies. For example, most of the fishing in Rwandan waters is done by local communities using imported fishnets and locally made wood canoes.

In light of the above, the challenges in the fisheries sector in Rwanda include the following;

- i. Lack of a fish eating tradition that did not consider fish as a high value commodity.
- ii. Poor regulatory framework of the fishing effort and fishing methods.
- iii. Inadequate Fishing cooperatives that are geared towards harvesting with no inputs into the fisheries.
- iv. Lack of adequate private sector investments in the sub-sector.
- v. Lack of interest in fisheries and aquaculture at the district level hence low rating of the sector. There is very little local leadership

support to fisheries and aquaculture development in almost all the districts.

- vi. Lack of institutions for management of research and advisory services.
- vii. There is no reliable data on the size of the fish stocks to guide management decisions.
- viii. Insufficient trained human resource to manage the sector.
- ix. Significant high post-harvest losses of the little fish harvested from the lakes.
- x. Lack of aquaculture technologies and innovations.
- xi. Insufficient advisory services.
- xii. Lack of fisheries and aquaculture inputs including feed, gear, equipment and others on the local market.

## Stakeholders' Perspectives

In regard to stakeholders' perspectives, whether from the public sector or non-state actors, the common voice is the call for the need to do more to develop the fisheries sector in Rwanda. Indeed, the various views and perspectives from various stakeholders point to the realization that the fisheries sector is not yet vibrant and more should be done to have it revived for the sake of ensuring nutritional feeding of the population as well as to tap into its economic potential to contribute to national development.

According to most government officials, the fisheries sector in Rwanda is not yet fully developed and the country's domestic production is not sufficient to satisfy the demand and as such, the importation of fish fills the gap. This is an interesting

reality because, it means that importing fish in Rwanda is not seen in the perspective of competition but rather as complementing on related demand. According to Ms. Peace BASEMERA, an Officer in Charge of Trade Negotiations in the Ministry of Trade, Industry and East African Community Affairs (MINEACOM), those engaged in the fishing business in Rwanda do not face competition related challenges. Ms. Pease BASEMERA says that; “.....*fishing in Rwanda is not yet at advanced levels and as such the importation of fish is not a competition threat to those involved in the fishing business, whether those fishing from lakes Kivu and Muhazi or those involved in fish farming (aquaculture)*”.

The realisation of an undeveloped fisheries sector in Rwanda is also emphasized by the non-state actors, like in the civil society. According to Mr. Francois MUNYENTWARI, the Country Director of ACORD Rwanda, the fisheries sector is not yet fully developed and he attributes that reality to the fact that fish is not very much consumed in Rwanda due to some historical and cultural dynamics. He says that; "*Despite the rapid growth of fish consumers in the cities, it is true that the fishing industry sector is still at the infancy stage in Rwanda. For a long time, fish is considered as food for the rich and reserved to those who know its nutritive values. Even culturally, fish was not part of the menu of poor families who fed on cassava and beans. But today, in a country where 37% of children under five are stunted, definitely fish should be part of the diet to counterbalance the deficit. This is something beyond the envisaged contribution of the sector to GDP growth, to be kept in mind when scaling-up from subsistence to commercially-*

*viable fisheries, and investing in fish value chain which is a pre-condition to improve processing facilities, infrastructure (storage, handling, and transporting) and appropriate technologies. Countries like Rwanda with huge potential of natural lakes and rivers require sufficient flexibility and policy support to allow for the development of viable and sustainable fisheries sectors, which ultimately contribute to national and regional food security."*

## **National laws and regulations governing the development and utilization of fisheries resources in Rwanda**

The Rwandan fisheries legal framework of the 1937 and 1950s relating to Game and Fishing was repealed and replaced by Law No. 58/2008 of 10/09/2008 determining the organization and management of Aquaculture and Fisheries in Rwanda. The new legislation covers various aspects of the industry such as: restrictions in fishing, introduction of aquatic species, aquaculture practices, and grounds for refusal of an aquaculture concession, protection of aquatic organisms, fishing licenses, hygiene and quality of aquaculture and fishery products. The new law provides for acquisition of aquaculture concessions in natural water bodies which is vital for transformation of aquaculture and fisheries industry.

In Rwanda, there is a Master Plan for Fisheries and Fish Farming under the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI). According to the Master Plan, the administration and regulation management and implementation of fisheries

policies and aquaculture is a mandate of Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB) which is one of the agencies of the Ministry (MINAGRI). In RAB, the Fisheries and Aquaculture section is headed by a desk officer at a level of a technician who is the only fisheries staff in RAB. Prior to the formation of RAB, Fisheries and Aquaculture was under the Department of Animal Husbandry which also included Animal Production, Veterinary Services, and Fisheries and Aquaculture divisions.

At the local government level, Fisheries and Aquaculture is the responsibility of the Veterinary or Agricultural Officers. The District Veterinary Officer is in charge of livestock activities, including extension work and implementation of the Fishery and Aquaculture policy. There is a conspicuously weak administrative structure for Fisheries and Aquaculture. The sector is managed by staff whose training is at times not directly related to fisheries discipline. As a result of the obscure Fisheries and Aquaculture structure with no Chief Fisheries Officer, Rwanda is yet to have a comprehensive policy, legal and regulatory frameworks on Fisheries including the consideration of relevant international obligations under the United Nations Framework.

Being a relatively new agricultural practice compared to crop and livestock husbandry, Aquaculture remains unfamiliar to several stakeholders including advisory service providers. In many aspects, aquaculture is a technology-driven sector that requires farmer responsive research. Presently, there are no institutions mandated to undertake Fisheries and Aquaculture research and training in Rwanda. Limited research aspects of Fisheries and Aquaculture are undertaken by the

University of Rwanda (UR) at Butare. The UR has one of the well-maintained aquaculture research stations at Rwasave used for training and teaching aquaculture.

## **The support and policy actions needed by Rwanda to cope with any negative effects of fisheries subsidies**

Given the current state of fisheries sector and the demand for fisheries resources, there is a need to put in place strategies and measures that will ensure that Rwanda can fully and sustainably utilize her resources to meet the high animal protein demand. According to the Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB), Rwanda has very good potential for increased fisheries productivity which if commercialized in approach and linked to sectors such as tourism together with an enabling policy can stimulate increased fish production for both local and regional markets. In this light, the following recommendations are hereby proposed;

- i. *Attracting more investors:* The relevant government institutions, especially the Rwanda Development Board (RDB) should put more efforts in attracting more investors in the fisheries sector and appropriate measures and initiatives should be pursued in regard to linking up with potential foreign investors. The following are the investment opportunities in fisheries sector in Rwanda; Fish processing, Fish farming, Production of fingerlings for restocking, Local and Regional Cold

Distribution Chain, identifying buyers and negotiating favourable sales terms, investing in drying equipment, Special spicing and cold smoking of fish, Fish net making and Fish packaging among others.

- ii. *Enhancing the relevant capacity by developing related skills and appropriate technologies:* It is important that technologies to harness this suitable fish stocks are adopted and the private sector be attracted to the industry. The following interventions are planned to start ornamental industry in Rwanda: Setting up a national fish aquarium not only for beauty but for education purposes as well; and Undertaking research to produce an inventory of fish species suitable for ornamental industry. Again, appropriate measures should be put in place to streamline fish value addition and marketing in Rwanda to attract investment in fish filleting and production of products such as fish ball, fingers, soups and others. Furthermore, there is a need to boost and provide support to the fisheries products promotion centers that are located in Kigali, Rwamagana and Musanze that are equipped with ice making machines for the improvement of the cold chain system in the transportation of fish and fishery products.
- iii. *Boosting value addition and export promotion:* Value addition to the Isambaza from Lake Kivu and the progressive ban on the marketing of this product using basins and baskets should be encouraged. As aquaculture industry in Rwanda grows, the

Public Private Partnership (PPP) should identify and develop new domestic and international markets, including specialty markets, import replacement and export development. In this light, support export enhancement programs and international trade missions for aquaculture products should be supported and promoted.

- iv. *Developing a national strategy to developing fisheries sector in Rwanda:* Given the development potential of the fisheries sector in Rwanda, there is a need to develop a comprehensive national strategy articulating how best the fisheries sector can be developed in Rwanda. In this light, mobilization efforts should focus on finding the best experts that can assist in designing the strategy and were necessary in finding the needed resources and technical assistance.

## **Recommendations to EAC's Delegates to the WTO**

Rwanda, unlike Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania is landlocked. However, being located at the shorelines of some of the world's largest and deepest freshwater lakes, provides these countries with tremendous opportunities for developing their freshwater fisheries sector. In this regard, the following recommendations are hereby proposed to the EAC WTO delegates for consideration in the upcoming WTO negotiations to reduce and eventually end fisheries subsidies measures;

1. *Standing in solidarity with the Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP):* The proposal of the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP) targets subsidies on large-scale commercial fishing activities including, prohibition of subsidies to vessels that engage in illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Rwanda and the EAC region being part of the ACP Group of Countries should maintain the same position and the EAC WTO delegates should maintain and support the position and proposals submitted by the ACP Group of Countries.
2. *Supporting the prohibition of subsidies that encourage any kind of fishing that would jeopardize the environment and sustainability of fish growth:* The EAC WTO delegates should recognize and support the urgency of curtailing subsidies that contribute to overcapacity, overfishing, as well as illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. This is very important to protect the environment and also secure fish availability and growth in a sustainable manner. This is very important and the same understanding was reflected in paragraph 173 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012 – “The Future We Want”.
3. *Recalling and emphasizing relevant international commitments:* There are some relevant international commitments that have already been made and the EAC WTO delegates should ensure that those commitments are recalled and emphasized. For example, the call to prevent the harmful impacts of fisheries subsidies received the unanimous endorsement of the international community in Sustainable Development Goal 14.6 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which sets the unambiguous target of 2020 for the elimination of certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing.
4. *Maintaining the Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) principle:* The EAC WTO delegates should ensure that the special and differential treatment (S&DT) principle in regard to fisheries related subsidies is maintained. This is in line with the ACP submission which recalls that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment (S&DT) for developing countries and least developed countries should be an integral part of the negotiations, taking into account the importance of the sector to development priorities, poverty reduction and livelihood and food security concerns.



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