

## THE POLITICS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF THE MAURITANIAN FISHING INDUSTRY

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Africa has considerable potential for developing its fishery resources. Some of the world's richest fishing grounds lie off the coasts of Mauritania, Angola, Morocco, Nigeria, and Senegal. At present, these fisheries are exploited mostly (sometimes almost exclusively) by foreign fishing fleets from Japan, South Korea, the USSR, and several European countries. Official statistics indicate that foreign fishing off West Africa accounted for 1.2 million metric tons in 1976, or roughly 2 percent of the total worldwide marine catch. A Senegalese official claimed (quite plausibly) that those figures were too conservative and that foreign fishing amounted to "at least three times" the official foreign catch (United States Department of Commerce [hereafter USDOC], 1976). In response to this dependence on foreign fishing, several African countries are attempting to develop their own fishing fleets. Nigeria, in particular, has been rapidly expanding its fleet during the last decade (*Marine Fisheries Review*, 1982). The Organization of African Unity emphasized fisheries development in its 1980 Plan of Action (*South*, 1983a: 68). African nations are attempting to challenge the Foreign fishing companies' dominant position. As this paper will show, these efforts are likely to increase indigenous participation in the fishing industry.

The issue of economic nationalism in the Third World has been widely discussed. It is frequently noted that Third World countries are now adopting aggressive policies toward foreign investors. Many countries require foreign investors to establish joint ventures in certain industries, to employ indigenous personnel, to share technology, and to construct local manufacturing and processing facilities. The long term significance of these trends has been more controversial. Several important studies (LaPalombara and Blank, 1979; Leys, 1978; Moran, 1974; Warren, 1973) have argued that economic dependence has diminished in much of the Third World as local capital has replaced, or at least complemented, foreign capital. Others (Hoogvelt, 1979; Joseph, 1978; Kaplinsky, 1980), adopting a more critical view, suggest that these gains are often overstated or illusory.

This paper examines these issues with respect to the fishing industry in Mauritania, a West African country of approximately two million people. Fishing is already an important sector of Mauritania's economy, accounting for eight percent of the Gross Domestic Product in 1980 (Wohlers, 1980: 2), and the government has made a major effort to "indigenize" the industry—to increase the

role of indigenous personnel and to generally make the industry more responsive to local needs. Fishing has great potential for growth and could eventually become the country's leading sector. Mauritania is also a good case study since there is a considerable amount of recent information on that country's fishing industry.

This paper discusses the development of Mauritania's fishing policy, the significance of the political and economic context in which fishing policy has been formulated, and the effects that these policies have had (and are likely to have) on Mauritania's overall development. Several questions will be considered. First, what conditions have made indigenization possible in Mauritania? Second, will such indigenization bring about general economic development? Finally, what are the prospects for fishery development in other West African countries?

### FISHERIES AND THE POLITICS OF DEPENDENCE

Mauritania is one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world. The population, composed mostly of herders and subsistence farmers, is largely illiterate and there is not a single university. In the late nineteenth century, the French occupied Mauritania primarily for strategic, rather than economic reasons (Bennoune, 1978: 36), and the country's infrastructure and communications are still rudimentary. Apart from fisheries, the "modern" sector of the economy consists almost entirely of iron ore and copper mining, which is dominated by foreign companies.

The fishing grounds off Mauritania are exceptionally rich. An oceanic phenomenon known as "upwelling" produces an environment that is particularly favorable for marine life. Fish species include cod, cuttlefish, lobster, octopus, sardines, shrimp, and tuna. Yet, these resources have not been of much benefit to Mauritania. The fish catch taken by Mauritanian vessels is only a minute percentage of its potential, and as Table 1 shows, the Mauritanian fish catch (both marine and freshwater) has not been increasing over time. In fact, the industry has made no progress during the past decade. The catch was exceptionally high in 1971, but it declined in the following years and has stagnated since 1974.

In the absence of any significant local fishing industry, Foreign fishing is overwhelmingly dominant off Mauritania. A total of between 800,000 and

TABLE 1  
Mauritanian Fish Catch,  
1971-80  
(metric tons)

Year	Catch
1971	73,300
1972	45,400
1973	42,400
1974	34,200*
1975-80†	34,200*

SOURCE: Food and Agriculture Organization (hereafter FAO), 1981: 48.

\* Estimates.

† Per annum.

1,100,000 metric tons of fish (between 1 and 2 percent of the world marine catch) were caught in Mauritania's two-hundred-mile Exclusive Economic Zone during 1978 (Wohlers, 1980: 1). Mauritanian vessels accounted for approximately 2 to 3 percent of the total marine catch, while the remaining catch was taken by foreign vessels,<sup>1</sup> operating both legally and illegally off Mauritania. Foreign fishing has a long history, officially beginning in 1900, when the French colonial authorities granted fishing rights to Spanish fishermen. Since Mauritania's independence in 1960, Spain's local fishing operations have continued. Several other countries fish along Mauritania's coast, particularly the USSR and Japan which, respectively, have the world's first and second largest fishing fleets (Folsom and Weidner, 1977).

The foreign fishing operations have done almost nothing to develop the country. Only a small percentage of the foreign catch is landed and processed in Mauritania. In 1978, foreign vessels landed about 39,000 metric tons of fish, or between 3 and 5 percent of the total foreign catch in Mauritanian waters that year.<sup>2</sup> The remainder was "trans-shipped" (Wohlers, 1980: 5-6), that is, placed on transport vessels and transferred to foreign ports, usually Las Palmas on Spain's Canary Islands. Fishermen prefer not to use Mauritania's main fishing port, Nouadhibou, because it lacks adequate ship maintenance, fish processing, and recreational facilities. Thus, the only benefit from the foreign fishing was the payment of fees by foreign fishermen to the Mauritanian government in exchange for fishing rights. The fees were quite small—probably less than 1 percent of the value of the total foreign catch during the period 1973-77<sup>3</sup>—because much of the foreign catch is taken by vessels that have no licenses and pay no fees. The Mauritanian government has been unable to patrol its coastline extensively and prevent illegal fishing.

The foreign fishing can be characterized as an enclave arrangement. The term "enclave" typically refers to mining operations in Third World countries, where the minerals are mined by foreigners, using foreign employees and equipment; these minerals are then exported and processed in foreign countries. Such mining operations have little impact on the local economy (Cardoso and Faletto, 1979). However, it is a slight exaggeration to call mining a pure enclave since the export operations must use local road, rail, and port facilities. Foreign fishing off Mauritania, on the other hand, was almost an ideal typical enclave, if we exclude the small portion of the catch that was actually landed. A major task of the Mauritanian government, practically since independence, has been to reduce this dependence on foreign fishing.

### FISHING POLICY, 1965-1978

Mauritania's fishing policy during the 1960s was influenced by the favorable economic conditions of that decade. The early economic growth was based almost exclusively on mining. Substantial deposits of iron ore were discovered after World War II, and the MIFERMA company (Societe Anonyme des Mines de Fer de Mauritanie), largely French-owned, began exploiting these minerals in 1952. Copper was later discovered, and the foreign-owned SOMIMA company (Societe Miniere de Mauritanie) began mining it in 1967 (Bennoune, 1978: 40-44). These mining operations became highly profitable and the economy more than doubled in size during the period 1960-66 (Amin, 1973a: 79), but the spectacular growth

of the mining sector did not lead to any real development. According to Amin (1973b: 553), "The growth of the economy was entirely confined to the mining sector and its immediate dependencies—especially rail transport. . . . One can hardly use the word 'industry' in talking about Mauritania."

The mining operations did generate government revenue, however, and these revenues, as well as a ten million dollar French loan, helped finance fisheries development. Beginning in 1965, the Mauritanian government made an ambitious effort to establish a national fishing fleet and a fish processing industry. The government established the parastatal company SOMAP (Societe Mauritanienne de l'Armement a la Peche) and purchased a fleet of thirteen vessels. Facilities for freezing and drying fish, as well as plants for producing fish meal, were also established. These facilities were placed under separate parastatal companies, located in the city of Nouadhibou (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development [hereafter IBRD], 1971: 5-6).

The SOMAP project was a failure. The company dissolved in 1969 after persistent financial losses. The government sold the thirteen fishing vessels, and by 1980, Mauritania's fishing fleet consisted only of three vessels, all owned by a private company (Wohlers, 1980: Enclosure 1). There is general agreement (Povolny, 1980: 20; IBRD, 1971: 6; Folsom and Weidner, 1976: 13) that SOMAP failed because of a lack of trained local personnel, poor management, and inadequate planning. The fish processing facilities, for example, were designed with a capacity six times greater than the port capacity (Westebbe, 1971: 59), and it is not surprising that the company was inadequately managed since Mauritania has one of the lowest levels of education in Africa.

After the embarrassing SOMAP failure in 1969, the Mauritanian government adopted a more passive fisheries policy. The goal of a nationally-controlled, state-owned fishing fleet was abandoned. Instead, the government simply licensed foreign fishermen and encouraged the formation of joint venture companies between Mauritians and foreign fishermen. In effect, the government left fishing to foreigners after 1969. The foreign fishermen responded enthusiastically to this policy change. The total catch in Mauritanian waters, overwhelmingly by foreign vessels, more than doubled in a single year, increasing from 422,000 metric tons in 1969 to 890,000 metric tons in 1970 (Wohlers, 1980: 2).

The new policy did almost nothing to develop the fishing industry. Approximately 95 percent of the foreign catch was trans-shipped, and less than 5 percent was landed and processed in Nouadhibou (Wohlers, 1980: 1; FAO, 1981: 54). The Mauritanian government's encouragement of joint venture companies also failed. A few joint ventures were formed, but according to the U.S. Embassy (Wohlers, 1980: 3), "they were largely tools of convenience for foreigners, who preferred to operate officially through a local partner." The Mauritanian government required that all foreign vessels employ and train several Mauritians. This requirement was a failure, and few Mauritians received any training. According to Folsom and Weidner (1976: 20):

Most foreign fishing captains did not attempt to train their Mauritanian crewmen. They (the Mauritians) were used on minor cleaning details and were encouraged to keep out of the way, even to the point where they were paid for a voyage, but were told to stay ashore. Unfortunately, too many seamen took their pay, stayed home, and sought other jobs.

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training might eventually have enabled the Mauritians to replace foreign fishermen.

The government did collect fees from the foreign fishermen in exchange for fishing licenses. These fees, however, only amounted to approximately six to seven million dollars per year during the 1973-77 period (Wohlers, 1980: 3). In contrast, the total value of the fish catch has been about one billion dollars per year (*African Business*, 1982: 44). Fee income was low partly because much of the catch was taken by unlicensed vessels that fished illegally and paid no fees. (The government lacked the patrol vessels and aircraft needed to protect the country's six-hundred-mile Atlantic coastline.) In addition, the foreign vessels often understated their catch and thus paid lower fees, since there were not enough Mauritanian personnel to inspect the foreign catch (Folsom and Weidner, 1976: 16; Wohlers, 1980: 9).

### ECONOMIC DECLINE IN THE 1970s

The overall economic situation in Mauritania changed dramatically during the 1970s. The country underwent a series of economic crises involving three factors: sustained agricultural drought, declining world demand for copper and iron ore, and a war involving the Western Sahara territories. These problems depleted the government's revenues and resulted in balance of payments deficits. The economic decline caused increased political and social tensions that threatened civil war. By the end of the 1970s, these tensions led to a military coup and a substantial revision of the fisheries policy.

The drought began in 1969 and continued during most of the 1970s. Since the overwhelming majority of Mauritians were employed in subsistence farming and herding, the drought had a catastrophic impact on this population. Cattle herds decreased by half from 1969 to 1979, while crop output decreased by 40 percent (Legum, 1981a: B568). An exodus to the cities resulted in urban overcrowding and mass unemployment. Nouakchott, the capital city, grew from 135,000 in 1977 to 225,000 in 1978 (Legum, 1980: B707).

During the same period, Mauritania experienced a major deterioration in its terms of trade. International prices for its mineral exports declined substantially due to slow industrial growth in Europe and the United States. Overall, Mauritania's imports increased while its exports decreased, resulting in a serious deficit by the late 1970s. By 1978, Mauritania was "as economically bankrupt as it is possible for a country to be" (Legum, 1980: B699). Several sources, mostly Arab countries, provided aid in 1979, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided standby credits in 1980 (Legum, 1981a: B567; 1981b: B553).

The war over newly-independent Western Sahara, which had previously been a Spanish colony, created additional economic strains. In 1975, Mauritania claimed the southern portion of Western Sahara, while Morocco claimed the northern portion. The claims of both countries were opposed by POLISARIO (Frente Popular para la Liberacion de Sagula el-Hamra y Rio de Oro), a Western Sahara political group that demanded complete independence. The Mauritanian and Moroccan armies attempted to suppress POLISARIO, and a general guerrilla war ensued. By 1976, the war had absorbed 33 percent of the Mauritanian government's budget (Bennoune, 1978: 50).

Mauritania's political situation became increasingly unstable. The economic problems exacerbated an unresolved cleavage between the northern and southern

regions. The north, largely desert or semidesert, was populated by nomadic peoples. Supporting more than two-thirds of Mauritania's total population, the north had dominated national politics since independence from France in 1960. The south, less arid, had a population that was largely sedentary. Southerners held a large share of the elite government positions (Legum, 1981a: B565) and had always resented northern domination of national politics. These long-standing regional tensions grew worse with the drought. By the end of the 1970s, there was serious talk of secession by the south, and civil war was viewed as a possibility (Legum, 1980: B699).

The economic and political crisis undermined the one-party civilian government of Mokhtar Ould Daddah, which had ruled since independence. A military coup overthrew Daddah in 1978, and the *Comite Militaire de Salut National* (CMSN), which has since ruled the country, was installed. The CMSN ended Mauritania's role in the war and repudiated its claims to the Western Sahara. Yet, "tensions generated by the war did not disappear with the truce" (Legum, 1980: B699). The political problems that contributed to Daddah's overthrow did not disappear either. It was clear that the new government would need some tangible success in order to survive.

### THE NEW FISHING POLICY, 1978-82

The CMSN was well aware that it needed to revitalize the economy in order to reduce regional tensions. The mining sector offered little hope of recovery, as export prices remained low.<sup>4</sup> The government decided upon fisheries development as a new source of foreign exchange, employment, and protein. In 1980, the national newspaper *Chaab* stated that: "the importance of the fishing sector . . . is not overlooked by anyone."<sup>5</sup> The CMSN, in 1978, realized that the old policy of simply licensing foreign fishing vessels had not stimulated any real development. On the other hand, the country lacked the resources to purchase and manage a national fishing fleet. The CMSN certainly did not want a repeat of the SOMAP fiasco. Therefore, the government decided to promote fisheries through joint ventures with foreign companies.

The CMSN's New Fishing Policy, announced in 1979, contained four main components. First, all foreign fishing companies were required to establish joint ventures with at least 51 percent Mauritanian ownership. The Mauritanian equity was to be paid through company profits, since the country was in no position to purchase equity directly. Second, all foreign vessels were required to land their entire catch at the port of Nouadhibou, or to have their catch inspected at sea, where Mauritanian officials were to determine the percentage of the catch to be processed locally, the amount to be exported without processing, and the required fees. Third, foreign firms had to construct fish processing plants in Nouadhibou during a prescribed period, usually within two years. Fourth, all foreign vessels were required to employ at least five Mauritians (Wohlers, 1980: 8; Wadleton, 1982: 3).

Early results suggest that the New Fishing Policy has significantly changed the relationship between the Mauritanian government and the foreign companies. The government has been tenacious in its negotiations, and the foreign companies appear to have made some important concessions. A 1981 Mauritanian-Japanese agreement strongly favored the Mauritians. Under this agreement, the Japanese

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were permitted to operate twenty vessels in Mauritanian waters through the joint venture company MAFCO (Mauritanian Fishing Company), which was to become 51 percent Mauritanian-owned. Seven of the twenty vessels were to land their entire catch at Nouadhibou for processing. Four of the twenty vessels were eventually to be turned over to the Mauritians. The agreement also considerably increased the level of fees which the Japanese paid, as well as their required level of fishery training and technical assistance (USDOC, 1981).

It also appears that the Mauritanian government has been relatively successful in coaxing other foreign companies into forming joint ventures. The U.S. Embassy in Nouakchott (1981) stated that "about a dozen" joint ventures had been established. These included joint ventures between foreign companies and the Mauritanian state, joint ventures between foreign companies and the Mauritanian private sector, and three-way arrangements involving foreigners, Mauritanian businessmen, and the Mauritanian state. Overall, by the end of 1980, joint ventures were 43 percent state-owned, 49.4 percent foreign-owned, and 7.6 percent privately-owned (Wadelton, 1982: 3). The New Fishing Policy has also enhanced coastal surveillance, although illegal fishing remains a problem. The U.S. Embassy (Wohlers, 1980: 7) commented that "the Navy now has a young, well-trained body of professional officers and their potential effectiveness has been increased by the purchase of three high speed Spanish patrol boats. . . ."

The government has been flexible with these new requirements. The joint venture requirement, apparently, has not been rigidly enforced, and licenses have been renewed with several foreign companies that have not formed joint ventures. In 1981, 70 percent of the government's fishery revenues still came from licensed vessels rather than from joint ventures (Wadelton, 1982: 3). A Mauritanian official stated that "Enough [joint venture companies] had already been created." The U.S. Embassy interpreted this flexibility as an indication that the Mauritanian government did not want to project a "radical" image that could frighten away the foreign fishermen who are essential to the government's plans (U.S. Embassy, Nouakchott, 1981).

The New Fishing Policy has had several failings as well. The requirement that all foreign catches be inspected by Mauritanian officials has never been enforced, due to a lack of personnel (Wohlers, 1980: 9), and despite improvements in surveillance, the U.S. Embassy believes that illegal fishing still accounts for up to 50 percent of the foreign catch (Wadelton, 1982: 4). It is not assured that the foreign fishing companies will comply with the government's training requirements. (It should be recalled that previous requirements for training were largely disregarded by the foreign fishermen.) Furthermore, there clearly are limits to the number of concessions that the foreign fishermen will make. The Japanese companies involved in the MAFCO joint venture suspended their operations in 1982, because of new Mauritanian government demands for further increases in fishing fees. It is not clear whether the Japanese plan to resume operations (*Latest Developments in International Fisheries* [hereafter *LDIF*], 1982: 1).

Overall, the New Fishing Policy has produced several tangible benefits. First, there has been a substantial increase in fishing fees paid by foreign fishermen to the Mauritanian government. Total fishing fees have increased from \$12 million in 1979 to \$31 million in 1981, and they are expected to continue to increase in the future (Wadelton, 1982: 7). Second, foreign fishermen appear to have increased their use of local facilities. The number of vessels operating from

Nouadhibou increased dramatically, from 10 in 1980 to 87 in 1981 (LDIF, 1982: 9). Also, three new fish processing plants were under construction in 1982 (Legum, 1984: B518).<sup>6</sup> Third, fishery exports have increased from \$19 million in 1979 to \$91 million in 1981 (Wadelton, 1982: 7), helping to offset the country's foreign trade deficit.

### THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The question of marine resources has attracted increased attention in recent years. Iceland and Great Britain had a "cod war" in the early 1970s. More recently, there has been a series of well-publicized fishery disputes between the U.S. and Canada, as well as within the European Economic Community. The issue of fisheries has become politicized for two primary reasons. The first is a shortage of fish. Fish stocks are becoming depleted, and there is increasing competition for the remaining fish. According to *The Global 2000 Report to the President* (Barney, 1982: 105):

The trend in marine fish has been downward since the peak year of 1970, demonstrating that the traditional marine fish populations are now fully exploited. In fact, many are severely overexploited. . . . Technological and social developments over the next 25 years will not, therefore, cause an increase in sustained yield of the traditional marine fisheries.

Marine fishing has thus become a zero-sum game. Fish catch can be increased somewhat by overfishing and by exploiting under-utilized species, such as krill. It is not clear, however, that there is sufficient demand for such non-traditional species. For some of the most valuable species, however, a country can only increase its fish catch at the expense of another country. The total demand for fish will probably increase as the world's population grows. The chronic food deficits in the USSR—with the world's largest fishing fleet—and in the Third World might also augment the demand for fish. Continued industrial pollution and, possibly, overfishing are likely to reduce world fish stocks.<sup>7</sup> The competition for fish will no doubt increase.

The second reason for the growing competition is the shortage of fishing grounds. Many countries have, in recent years, extended their fishing limits to 200 miles, instead of the three-mile territorial waters that have been traditional in international law. These extended zones are especially important since the world's best fishing grounds are generally along the continental shelf, well within most of the extended zones. Most African coastal countries have declared 200-mile fishing limits. These changes will contribute to the competition (see Lee, 1984).

How has increased competition for fish and fishing grounds affected African countries? It seems easy to draw the conclusion that a stagnant world catch would pose problems for all countries. This conclusion is untenable. Reduced fishery resources have hurt the fishing industries of some countries, but other countries have benefited. Specifically, the "old" fishing countries—those that had modern fleets before 1970, and especially those that engage in substantial fishing in foreign waters—are likely to suffer from the increased competition and the advent of the 200-mile zones. In fact, some of the world's major fishing countries, including Japan, the USSR, and Spain, have suffered in recent years (USDOC, 1981; Lee, 1984: 1-2). Countries with undeveloped fishing industries, however, are in an advantageous position. Every coastal country in Africa, with the sole exception of South Africa, fits into this latter category. In African waters, foreign

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vessels do most of the fishing, and the foreign fishermen are probably eager to continue fishing in these grounds since the competition is so keen. Foreign companies are thus more likely to make concessions to African governments. They are more likely to agree to high fees, joint ventures, and requirements for technical assistance. This conclusion is consistent with the research of Moran (1980), which shows that host countries can negotiate more effectively with foreign companies if the industry is highly competitive. "The presence of competition, of course, greatly enhances the bargaining power of the host (country), even if it requires local authorities to actively recruit alternative investors to play off against one another" (Moran, 1980: 77). The international environment appears to favor Mauritania's New Fishing Policy, and similar policies throughout Africa.

### FISHERIES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Mauritanian fisheries sector has undergone a considerable transformation. Prior to the New Fishing Policy, fisheries was a classic example of dependency, being exploited almost exclusively by foreigners and having no major impact on the local economy. Under the New Fishing Policy, however, the government has pressured foreign companies to make major concessions which have increased the local impact of fisheries. Moreover, recent international trends suggest that several other African countries will be able to obtain similar benefits. In short, Africans will increasingly play a role in the fishing industry. However, a question still arises: can these changes be termed "development"?

One possible goal of economic development is to improve the quality of life for the general population. The Mauritanian government has made a strong verbal commitment to the equitable development of fishing. The Minister of Fisheries stated in 1982 that "Our marine resources belong to all the Mauritanian people. . . . The state must see to it that everyone profits from these resources" (Chaab, 1982).<sup>8</sup> It is easy to show, however, that fisheries development has had little impact on the majority of the people. Mauritania had a total labor force of 648,000 in 1975, but only 1,600 were employed in modern-sector fishing, either in the processing plants or aboard ships (Povolny, 1980: 25), and it is unlikely that fisheries will ever employ a large number of people, since commercial fishing is far less labor intensive than subsistence farming and herding. The government, in fact, may have to reduce employment to increase efficiency. The IMAPEC (Industries Mauritaniennes de Peche) fish processing plant in Nouadhibou, for example, employs 550 people, even though it could be operated with only 80 (Wohlers, 1980: 6).

Mauritania's lack of a fishing tradition may also make it difficult to achieve equity in the fishing industry. In some countries, such as Senegal, there are many artisanal fishermen who harvest a substantial percentage of the total marine catch (*African Business*, 1982: 45; *South*, 1983a: 68). In Senegal, government aid to artisanal fishermen has benefited a significant part of the population and also has helped to increase the country's total output. In Mauritania, however, the number of artisanal fishermen, about 1,800 (Waderton, 1982: 5), is so small that the government will probably not be able to focus on small-scale fisheries development. Mauritania may have no alternative to developing relatively large-scale commercial fisheries, which will not provide employment for very many of the displace nomads and peasants.

Fisheries might, however, prove beneficial by raising nutritional levels. In 1977, Mauritians were already consuming an average of 6.2 grams of fish protein per capita, per day, which was higher than the average world consumption of 3.8 grams per day (FAO, 1980: 21, 615). It is clear that a market for fish already exists, especially in the southern region. Since overall protein consumption has been quite low (especially since the drought), fish consumption could easily be expanded. Increased fish consumption could help compensate for the disastrous performance of Mauritania's agricultural sector<sup>9</sup> and might also reduce the country's dependence on food imports. A large portion of the population could therefore benefit if fishing were increased.

Fisheries might also help develop the economy as a whole, serving as a basis for the growth of other industries. The industrial impact of fisheries will be determined by four factors. First, can fisheries integrate with the different sectors of the economy? Hirschman (1978) stresses the importance of integrated economic development. According to Hirschman, Third World governments should invest in sectors that stimulate the development of supporting industries. In fisheries, backward linkages might stimulate local construction of fishing vessels and equipment as well as ports and vessel maintenance facilities. Forward linkages could occur in processing and canning.

Unfortunately, fishing is less integrative than almost any other sector of the economy. One study (cited by Hirschman, 1978: 106-7) shows that fishing has less potential for backward and forward linkages than any type of manufacturing, agriculture, energy production, or mining. Of the twenty-nine sectors included in the study, fisheries ranks twenty-sixth. Only transport, services, and trade are less integrative. Fishing, apparently, is even less integrative than metal mining, which failed to develop Mauritania's economy during the 1960s.

Yet, the Mauritanian government may have no alternative to promoting fisheries as a leading sector. A policy of large-scale industrialization, through import substitution or any other means, is not a realistic possibility since the domestic market is much too small, and since the level of infrastructure and education is too underdeveloped. Fisheries, although relatively uncomplicated, will be a major undertaking for Mauritania.

A second issue is whether the new revenues will be used productively. The New Fishing Policy, as we have seen, has greatly increased government revenues. These revenues could potentially be used for the continued expansion of fishing, for the development of supporting industries, and for the improvement of hard-pressed sectors, such as agriculture. However, increased revenue does not necessarily lead to economic development, as has been demonstrated by the study *Growth Without Development: An Economic Survey of Liberia* (Clower et al., 1966). According to this study, the Liberian government obtained considerable revenues from foreign-dominated mining and plantation concessions, but the money was spent on prestigious projects (such as a presidential palace) and on luxury consumption by the upper classes. These revenues failed to produce any long term economic development. A study by Joseph (1978) shows that petroleum exports have had a similar impact in Nigeria. The same analysis could probably be made for Mauritania's mining economy during the 1960s. Fishery revenues will not automatically bring about economic development.

A third issue is whether the Mauritanian government will be able to conserve its marine resources. Overfishing, primarily by foreign fishermen, is becoming a real danger for West African countries.<sup>10</sup> Also, in Mauritanian waters:

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... foreign vessels employ highly destructive fishing techniques to rake in the highest profit possible in the shortest time. Thus, fishing is prevalent in forbidden zones where the fish spawn; deep sea nets scrape the ocean floor, rendering sterile large areas of the continental plateau. Finally, cargoes of low value fish are jettisoned . . . (*African Business*, 1982: 44).

Unlike mining, fisheries is a renewable resource; it should last indefinitely. If the overfishing and other destructive activities are not curtailed, however, Mauritania's fish stocks may be irreparably damaged or destroyed. Efforts to reduce such abuses will be hampered by the inadequacy of the coastal surveillance system, and by the government's immediate need for hard currency from fishery exports and fees. The Mauritanian government may be tempted to sacrifice its long term interests for short-term gains.

A fourth issue is whether Mauritania's social structure will favor fisheries development. In order to fully indigenize fishing, Mauritians must manage the industry on their own, eventually supplanting the foreign companies. One danger is that the Mauritians (both private entrepreneurs and state bureaucrats) will be content to obtain payments from the foreign companies and will not play a productive role in fisheries. Mauritanian businessmen might invest in joint ventures for purely speculative purposes.<sup>11</sup> Such nominal participation would entail continued foreign domination of the industry.

Turner (1978) has discussed these problems with respect to Nigeria. According to Turner, Nigeria has remained dependent on multinational corporations for almost all of its manufactured goods, despite that country's rapid economic growth. Nigerians seldom invest directly in industry and do not compete with the multinationals. Instead, they act as middlemen for the multinationals, working as "importers, exporters, representatives for foreign salesmen and marketing firms, representatives for foreign firms seeking a particular contract, job-finders, advisors, facilitators, intermediaries" (Turner, 1978: 168). Also, Nigerian capitalists, using their influence with state bureaucrats, obtain the necessary permits, licenses, and contracts for the multinationals.

Turner points out that all parties profit from this arrangement. The multinational gains political legitimacy from its association with influential Nigerians. Moreover, such associations may provide the multinational with preferential access to local markets, labor supplies, or natural resources, giving the company an advantage over its competitors. The Nigerian capitalist, in turn, receives a commission from the multinational, while the bureaucrat receives a bribe. Generally, Nigerian businessmen have little incentive to make long term investments in manufacturing because of capital shortage, high political risk, and, above all, because it is far more profitable to service the foreign companies. This incentive structure is generated partly by internal conditions, but also by Nigeria's dependence on foreign capital. In short, the Nigerian capitalist does not participate directly in the productive process; he services foreign capital, often acting as its agent. Such a political economy Turner terms "commercial capitalism."<sup>12</sup>

There is some evidence that Mauritania is heading in the direction of commercial capitalism. The magazine *South* (1982b) notes that:

The fishing sector also yields lucrative speculation by Mauritanian businessmen, often with the help of civil servants. Prime Minister Maouya Ould Taya recently called for an end to "anarchic policies in this sector which have led to the flourishing of fictitious companies and all kinds of irregularities." Some Mauritanian businessmen have special arrangements with Canary Island fishing

circles, receiving commissions to serve as straw men for Spanish trawler owners, enabling them to fish in Mauritanian waters.<sup>13</sup>

It would appear that Mauritanian businessmen, like their Nigerian counterparts, are acting as middlemen for the foreign companies rather than challenging foreign dominance. It is not yet clear that the Mauritanian government will be able to curtail such practices.

This discussion does not suggest that the New Fishing Policy will be able to a cosmetic change without substance. On the contrary, the policy has simply been augmented government revenues, increased the use of local facilities, and brought construction of new on-shore processing plants. These changes, in turn, have greatly increased the participation of Mauritanian middlemen. Yet, the most important functions of the industry remain firmly controlled by foreigners. Before the New Fishing Policy, the foreign companies dominated fishing almost without restriction. Now, it appears that they are still allowed to dominate the industry, if they are associated with influential Mauritanian middlemen.

### CONCLUSION

The discussion has shown that many African countries may benefit from their fishery resources, provided that these resources are not destroyed by overfishing. International circumstances favor African countries and may enable them to obtain greater concessions from foreign fishermen. Fisheries seem to have followed the same pattern that has been well established in many industries throughout the Third World.

However, the impact of fisheries development will probably be limited. It will not bring about large-scale development because it lacks backward and forward linkages. The potential for creating employment is also small, except where there is significant artisanal fishing. Increased fishery revenues will not necessarily be used productively. Moreover, it is not certain that the New Fishing Policy, or similar efforts in other countries, will reduce the current level of dependence on foreign fishing companies. Indigenous participation does not mean that the foreigners will be displaced or will lose their dominant position. Cardoso and Faletto (1979: xx) define dependency as a situation where "the accumulation and expansion of capital cannot find its essential dynamic component inside the system." By this definition, the Mauritanian fishing industry remains dependent. The New Fishing Policy has ended traditional enclave dependency, but it may have produced a qualitatively new type of dependency. Nevertheless, fisheries development could still prove useful, by providing additional foreign exchange and a new, locally-produced source of protein. These benefits will compensate, at least partially, for the recent problems of low agricultural output. Fisheries development, in conclusion, will bring some benefits for Africa, but it will be no panacea.

### NOTES

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1. In West Africa as a whole, 65 percent of the catch is taken by foreign fishermen (*African Business*, 1982: 44).
2. The amount of fish landed by foreign vessels was calculated by the author, based on figures from FAO (1981: 54) and Wohlers (1980: 1). Also note that, despite the very low level of landings in 1970, Povolny (1980: 21-22) states that fish landings had been gradually increasing during the 1970s.
3. The 1 percent figure is calculated by the author, based on statistics from *African Business* (1982: 44) and Wohlers (1980: 3).
4. Despite the prices declines, the Mauritanian government has continued to invest in mining.
5. Translated from the French by the U.S. Foreign Broadcast Information Service.
6. It is unclear whether these developments have led to improvements in Nouadhibou's docking and ship-maintenance facilities.
7. This has been a problem in the European Economic Community, where "experts acknowledge that virtually all countries are guilty of overfishing" (*The Economist*, 1982: 66). Note, however, that the depletion of fish stocks may be somewhat less severe than the *Global 2000* study indicates. The worldwide marine catch actually increased slightly during the 1970s (Lee, 1984: 1), although this increase partly reflects the prodigious overfishing and, possibly, exploitation of non-traditional species.
8. Translated from the French by the author.
9. Agricultural problems have been serious throughout most of Africa. The well-known World Bank (1981) study *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa* notes that Africa's agricultural production has lagged behind its population growth. Many countries, including Mauritania, have experienced an absolute decline in agricultural output since 1970 (World Bank, 1981: 144). These problems have led to increased food imports and decreased exports of cash crops—a major reason for Africa's trade deficits and foreign debt problems. These trends have also led to increased malnutrition.
10. West African countries are especially vulnerable to overfishing for several reasons. First, it is still possible that, despite the difficulties, Mauritania and other countries will eventually establish national fishing fleets that will replace the foreign vessels. This possibility leaves the foreigners uncertain about the future of their operations off West Africa, making them less concerned about conserving fish stocks. Foreign fishermen might even adopt an attitude of "let's take as much as we can while we can." Second, fleets from many fishing companies (based in several different countries) operate in African waters. This situation reduces each individual company's interest in protecting fish stocks. Overfishing appears to be a classic "collective action" problem, as discussed in Olson (1965). Finally, the high level of competition for fishing grounds and the stagnant world catch encourage countries to overfish and to increase their short-term consumption and profits.
11. Speculative investment in joint venture companies has also been a major problem in Nigeria (Joseph, 1978).
12. Fanon (1963: 152-53) remarked on the essentially commercial orientation of the African bourgeoisie: "The national middle class discovers its historic mission: that of intermediary. . . . The national bourgeoisie will be quite content with the role of the Western bourgeoisie's business agent. . . ."
13. Similarly, the U.S. Embassy (Wadelton, 1982: 9) reports that there is "widespread corruption" in the fishing industry.

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