

Plundering the Pacific

Globalization is not good news for Pacific Island fisheries and the people who depend on them, says Martin Tsamenyi.

Nowhere in the world have the negative aspects of globalization on marine fisheries been more pronounced than in the Pacific Islands region which encompasses some of the world's smallest and most vulnerable States and ecosystems.

The coastal and marine ecosystems of these island States are extremely important for sustaining the livelihoods of the Pacific Islanders, providing food and nutritional security. The region supports the world's largest tuna fishery with an estimated value of almost US\$ 3.1 billion. For many Pacific Island States, foreign fishing access agreements in their exclusive economic zones (EEZs) provide the main source of government revenue. Other important economic activities such as tourism depend on a healthy marine environment.

But globalization has led to the region becoming home to fishing fleets from every corner of the globe—from Europe, North America, South America, Asia and Africa. This has resulted in indiscriminate and uncontrolled licensing of foreign fishing vessels, pressure on already weak governance systems and corruption. Increased foreign fishing is threatening key tuna species, particularly bigeye and yellowfin.

Many distant water fishing fleets, both licensed and unlicensed, have exploited the lack of enforcement capabilities of Pacific Island States by engaging in illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. This takes many forms including fishing without licenses, false reporting of catch, unauthorized transshipment of catches and failure to activate vessel monitoring systems.

Globalization in the marine fisheries sector began with the doctrine of the "freedom of the seas" propounded by the Dutch lawyer, Hugo Grotius in the 17th century, under which fishing fleets roamed much of the world's oceans unregulated. The declaration of EEZs under the 1982 UN Law of the Sea Convention, rather than curtailing the expansion and global reach of the world's distant water fishing fleet, accelerated it. The Law of the Sea requirement that coastal States grant access to surpluses of their allowable catch in their EEZs has allowed the global fishing fleet to move freely from one jurisdiction to another.

Opening up of coastal States' EEZs under access agreements has brought some benefits such as increased access to fisheries technology, capacity building for developing countries through foreign bilateral trade partnerships, and access to world markets for fish products.

The globalized international institutional and legal framework for fisheries provided by the UN system, Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) and the myriad NGOs active in marine conservation have led to international norms and best practice on sustainable fisheries management. These include the precautionary approach, the ecosystem approach to fisheries management, technical assistance and capacity building for developing countries.

be stepped up to combat IUU fishing through for example, harmonization of IUU listing criteria by RFMOs. Better coordination is needed at the international level among institutions that have an oceans mandate. Rules need to be developed further to ensure transparency regarding fishing vessel registration and ownership. Codes of conduct for good governance would help tackle corruption in fisheries. And governance capacity building for developing States and the promotion



These positive aspects of globalization have been equally matched by the negative, particularly on marine ecosystems and food security in many developing countries. These include harmful subsidies, use of 'flags of convenience' (where ships register in a foreign country to reduce operating costs or avoid government regulations) resulting in IUU fishing, the availability, through international trade, of destructive fishing technologies, and 'commodification' of new species such as reef fishes for export to restaurants and aquariums in Western countries. All these factors have had a severe impact on marine ecosystems and on the food resources of coastal communities.

Globalization and its impacts on all facets of human activity including fishing are unavoidable. Urgent and concerted regional and international action is needed to ensure that the negative aspects of globalization, particularly on marine biodiversity and the people who depend on it, are properly managed. There are many items on the priority list. One is the creation of a global record of fishing vessels and more transparent disclosure of ownership. Global efforts need to

of community-based or participatory management, particularly in coastal fisheries, could bring much needed change to regions such as the Pacific Islands.

Many of these activities are already being addressed in various regional and international fora principally through inter-governmental institutions. To be effective, it is important that they are implemented in partnership with the wider conservation community. With the proper controls and safeguards in place, there is no reason why globalization and stewardship of the marine environment cannot coexist. ■

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