The Status of FADs Fishery along the Kenyan Coast: Socio-Economic Problems and Prospects

H.O. Onyango, J. Ochiewo, N. Karani, C. Abunge & C. Magak
Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI)
owitzhorace@yahoo.com

Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs) have been proposed as a new technological frontier with better prospects for capture of high valued fish species like tuna, thus improving income to coastal fishers. Existing fishing methods and traditional vessels used by artisanal fishers in Kenya coast are not efficient enough to harvest a scattered resource and confine fishers to overfished sheltered reef areas. However, uptake of this technology by fishers has been very disappointing in spite of attempts by various projects to deploy experimental FADs. This study provides a socio-economics lens with which to view the current status of Kenya’s FADs fishery, with respect to the prospects and problems for its uptake by coastal artisanal fishers and ensuing management and livelihood challenges. Survey data was collected through a combination of questionnaires and participant observations. Results reveal that fishing activities are undertaken within the shallow protected waters of the barrier reef by artisans who operate small non-mechanized crafts. Fishing time is still relatively high (7hrs/day) even though the most prevalent gear is the traditional basket trap (43%). The modal daily income for fishers averaged at Kshs 400 (~$3.9). Only 13% of the fishers were aware of FADs in a reasonable sense and provisional FAD fishers who had been engaged in trial projects rated FADs as highly effective (72%). The shortcomings of FADs included: increase in theft and vandalism of equipment (50%), attraction of illegal fishers (25%), and fisher-fisher conflicts due to little sensitization. Overall, fishers viewed FADs projects as unsustainable, since the required expertise is scarce while the equipment is expensive. We recommend that fishers should be equipped with modern fishing vessels that can guarantee fishing beyond the reef where FADs are deployed. FADs should be fabricated from locally available materials in order to enable fishers to run and advance the technology.