

WHAT WE HAVE NOT ACHIEVED IN FISHERIES SECTOR

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Fishery has been carried out in Maldives for centuries. In fact we do not know of a time in the past history when fisheries was not practiced. The Major fisheries were that of pole and line of skipjack tuna. The craft used in this fishery was sailing traditional craft known as Dhoni. Shark fishery was done to obtain oil for the purpose of applying on fishing crafts. Reef fishing was practiced only when tuna fishing was bad. Only smoked and dried fish and dry salted fish were produced. Majority of people and the nation depended on fisheries for income and revenue.

It was only in the seventy's real changes started taking place in the fisheries sector. The marketing of tuna in the frozen form started in 1972 and mechanization of fishing fleet was initiated in 1974. A tuna-canning factory was put up at Felivaru island in Faadippolhu Atoll in 1976. Starting that much investment have been made in the fisheries sector with assistance mostly from the World Bank and grant aid from the Government of Japan. These investments were in the form of shore based freezing and storage complexes, further mechanization of fishing fleet and upgrading of tuna cannery at Felivaru island. Technical and skill training has taken place and establishment of Marine Research Center of Fisheries, Agriculture and Marine Resources has enhanced scientific research on marine resources.

Despite all the effort made by the Government and the private Sector fisheries has lagged behind in its development compared with other economic sectors. Although structural changes has taken place in the fisheries sector catch of tuna has not increased, the share in gross domestic product of the nation has decreased, the employment in the sector and the revenue from the sector has not increased in real terms.

Why have we failed to keep up with the other sectors of economy? First we never had a long term Development Plan as in other social and economic sectors. It is true that the Government has invested heavily in the fisheries sector. We need a Fisheries Development Plan outlining policy matters regarding management and development of fisheries resources, private sector involvement and investment projects. We need to know inter sectional relations, training and research requirement. Secondly we have not encouraged major private sector investment by making clear policy on the role of the private sector in fisheries development. Private investments have been made with great risks and many projects undertaken have failed due to lack of encouragement. Thirdly there is no active organization at the national level to voice the concerns of the fishermen or the private sector. Fishermen have very little saying in pricing their products or matters regarding their livelihood. They need to be more involved in management and development matters. Fourthly, we do not have sufficient trained manpower in the sector. Establishing a training scheme for the fisheries sector is an urgent need. Manpower development plan is required for the fishery sector for training technical and unskilled personals. Lastly legal and institution framework is not conducive to the development of all fisheries resources. We need to redraft and introduce many laws and regulations. We also need to define

responsibilities of different institutions more clearly.

I believe much has happened in the fisheries sector during the last thirty years but there is much we have not achieved too. We have to put much effort if we are to further develop the fisheries resources of our country.