Fisheries and Aquaculture Linked to Economic Growth Across Africa, Study Finds

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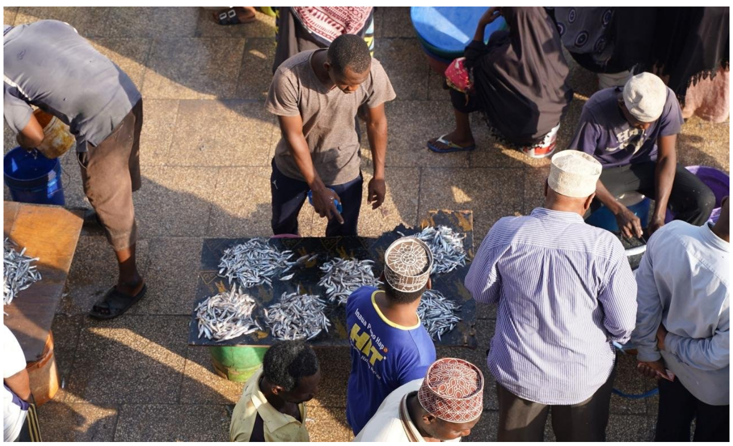

Fisheries and aquaculture contribute significantly to economic growth across Africa, with increases in fish production associated with higher GDP per capita, according to new research published in Marine Policy.

The study analysed 35 years of data from Egypt, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria and South Africa, examining capture fisheries and aquaculture separately to assess their respective contributions to national economic growth.

The findings show that both sectors have a positive and significant economic impact, although capture fisheries currently make a stronger contribution. The researchers found that a 1 per cent increase in total fisheries production was associated with a 0.459 per cent increase in GDP per capita. For capture fisheries, a 1 per cent increase in production was associated with a 0.466 per cent increase in GDP per capita, compared with 0.096 per cent for aquaculture.

The results remained positive after accounting for factors including capital investment, foreign direct investment, access to credit and the possibility that economic growth could itself influence fish production.

Africa's Fish Production Expands

Africa's total fish production increased from approximately 5 million tonnes in 1990 to 13 million tonnes in 2022. Aquaculture recorded particularly rapid growth during this period, rising from less than 90,000 tonnes to more than 2.4 million tonnes.

Capture fisheries also expanded, although production growth has levelled off since the mid-2010s.

According to the researchers, capture fisheries remain the stronger economic driver in the countries studied because of their established contribution to food supply, employment, trade and export earnings. Both large-scale and small-scale fisheries continue to support livelihoods and national fish supplies.

However, opportunities to expand capture fisheries are increasingly constrained by overfishing, climate change, ecosystem degradation and competing demands on aquatic resources.

Aquaculture Offers Growth Opportunities

The study highlights aquaculture as an important avenue for increasing aquatic food production while reducing additional pressure on wild fish stocks. However, greater production alone may not guarantee wider economic benefits.

Aquaculture producers in many African countries continue to face challenges including high feed and seed costs, limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure and extension services, and competition from imported fish.

Addressing these constraints could help translate increases in aquaculture production into higher productivity, stronger businesses and broader economic gains.

The contribution of aquaculture also varies considerably across countries. Egypt produces more than 1.5 million tonnes of farmed fish annually and accounts for around two-thirds of Africa's aquaculture output. In countries such as Kenya and Madagascar, where aquaculture is less developed, the sector currently contributes more through local food supply and household consumption than through large-scale production and exports.

The researchers argue that the findings strengthen the case for integrating fisheries and aquaculture into national economic planning rather than treating them solely as food production sectors. Beyond providing nutritious food, the sectors generate employment and income across value chains while supporting trade, government revenues and economic activity.