

Economy

With tourism struggling, should fisheries come to the rescue?

The pristine beaches of Mahé, the main island of Seychelles, are unusually deserted for this time of year. But then again, nothing seems usual in 2020. Seychelles, like many other countries around the world, has been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Seychelles' tourism sector, accounting for 24 per cent of the economy directly, and an estimated 75 per cent indirectly, has been hit hardest as visitor arrivals have fallen to almost zero over the past months and are now only slowly increasing. Similar vulnerabilities are happening around the world. Coastal towns and areas—where, according to the World Bank, 80 per cent of tourism takes place—are struggling. In these areas, the immediate hope is for tourists to return soon so that local economies and livelihoods can be revived.

This is not the first major crisis. But the magnitude of this pandemic, the human suffering, its ongoing and projected social and economic damages, combined with other already existing global environmental emergencies seem to be influencing public perception and creating a readiness for change. A return to 'business as usual' is no longer an option. Two opportunities seem to emerge from the current discussions: the need to further diversify economies; and the chance to rebuild sectors in a more resilient and sustainable way—often summarised by the slogan 'building back better'.

In Seychelles, like many other tourism-heavy Small Island Development States (SIDS), hopes of fulfilling these opportunities are being pinned on the country's fisheries sector. Despite having a land mass of just 455 km², Seychelles is a major player in the global tuna industry, with Port Victoria one of the busiest industrial fishing ports in the Western Indian Ocean. Marine fisheries have grown to become a critical resource for fulfilling economic and food and nutrition security, as well as the cultural needs of millions of people around the world. For millennia, people who dedicated themselves to fishing either for family consumption or as a commercial activity had no cause to worry about the sustainable management of this natural resource. Fish stocks replenished themselves with ease. But this is no longer the case. The pandemic has struck at a time when the ocean is already under increasing

threat from myriad impacts, including climate change, pollution and overfishing. According to the latest report from the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations, more than 34 per cent of global fish stocks are already fished at biologically unsustainable levels. While we see encouraging evidence of fisheries being properly managed, the report also indicates that where fisheries management is not in place, or is ineffective, the status of fish stocks is poor and deteriorating.

Also, the fisheries sector itself is not immune to this pandemic. Although COVID-19 does not infect aquatic species, the sector is affected substantially. For example, in some parts of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, more than 90 per cent of small-scale fishers were forced to stop fishing during lockdowns. In other countries, fishers have been unable to sell their catches, or need to sell their catches below a profitable level.

This makes it evident that the long-term sustainability of one sector must not be sacrificed to compensate for losses incurred in another. Nor should short-term economic gains undermine the long-term resilience of the economy. Instead, sustainability must be at the centre of the massive financial packages being unveiled around the world as these move from immediate rescue measures towards stimulus measures for triggering economic recovery. Hence, recovery policies need to be measured on more than just economic growth and total job creation, and should include social and ecological aspects as well.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and each country must find its own way. However, three underlying principles should be observed to ensure a shift towards sustainable practices.

First, the tasks at hand are too complex to be addressed by governments alone. Well-designed recovery policies need to be determined through collective partnerships between governments, business and civil society organisations. These collaborations not only enhance problem-solving



FITI are working alongside government to provide credible information to the public on the marine fisheries sector

capacities but also legitimise decisions that will potentially have lasting effects.

Second, the public availability of credible information is a basic necessity for such inclusive processes. In the case of fisheries, the number of vessels licensed to fish, the reliability of reported catch data, the sustainability of fish stocks, and the value added to the economy from different types of fishing and fish processing are all critical considerations when formulating and implementing national policies. Seychelles is collaborating with the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FITI), a global multi-stakeholder partnership that defines for the first time the information that national authorities must publish on the marine fisheries sector. Seychelles' first report to the FITI, due by the end of 2020, will now be an even more important tool for institutionalising and improving the dialogue and cooperation with all bona fide stakeholders. Transparency is the cornerstone of the country's endeavours to transit towards a sustainable ocean economy; and it is a core principle of the country's 'Blue Economy: Strategic Policy Framework and Roadmap'.

Third, simply publishing information on a website or in a newspaper will not in itself reduce unsustainable practices, secure jobs or generate income. Transparency does not magically translate into better decision-making,

increased oversight and accountability, or in this case healthier oceans. Strong leadership in public institutions is needed to work with different stakeholders towards a common goal. In recognition of this, Seychelles

has anchored its commitment towards fisheries transparency in its overarching efforts on open government.

The current crisis has presented unprecedented challenges and has clearly laid out crucial vulnerabilities in our economic structure. Luckily, the opportunity to embrace a more sustainable recovery does not need to start from scratch. The UN Sustainable Development Goals provide a compass for ensuring that social development and wellbeing are fully integrated with environmental objectives. While many of us are still working from home offices, it is now time to take stock, reflect and determine inclusive policies and action areas that safeguard prosperity for the longer term while protecting our planet.

Ronald Jumeau, Permanent Representative to the United Nations and Ambassador for Climate Change, Republic of Seychelles.

Sven Biermann, Executive Director of the International Secretariat of the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FITI).



Vacancy

The SEYCHELLES HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION is looking for a dynamic team player for the post of CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Responsibilities

- Ensure effective management of the day-to-day affairs of the Commission
- Implement the strategic vision and objectives of the Commission
- Act as Secretary to the Commission
- Plan, organize and coordinate the work of the Commission, in preparation of Commission sittings or special meetings
- Coordinate and manage networking of the work of all Units of the Commission
- Oversee the management of the budget and staff of the Commission
- Recommend appropriate internal procedures for the operations of the Commission and ensure compliance with relevant laws of the jurisdiction;
- Manage the human resources of the Commission
- Create and maintain a conducive working environment where all staff feel respected and valued
- Prepare (in collaboration with all units of the Commission) and submit the approved Annual Report on the activities of the Commission, together with the audited Statement of Account, to the Minister
- Prepare (in collaboration with all units of the Commission) and submit the approved report to the President and National Assembly every six months on the activities of the Commission, the performance of its functions and the achievement of its objectives
- Co-operate with other bodies performing human rights functions in Seychelles and internationally and may, for that purpose, establish mechanisms for sharing information and working jointly with those bodies;
- Represent the Commission at meetings as and when required.
- Carry out special assignments as instructed by the Commission
- Any other duties as may be assigned the Commission

Qualifications and Experience

Degree in Management or Administration, law or social or other relevant field

Experience in managerial positions

Excellent communication, analytical and reporting skills

Committed to the promotion and protection of human rights and human dignity

Ability to work constructively and respectfully with all population groups and across all levels of power.

Working knowledge of Seychelles Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and the Seychelles Human Rights Commission Act, as well as other human rights instruments would be an advantage.

Send application letters and CVs to admin@seychelleshumanrights.com or deliver at Bel Air Complex, Bel Air Road. All applications should be in by the 25th of September 2020.



From tourism to fisheries, Seychelles' economic diversification requires continued transparency to maintain inclusive decision-making with all stakeholders