Artisanal fishers and their craft*

Artisanal fishers comprise boat captains, independent fishers and crewmembers using traditional gear, lines and nets as well as fishers who rely on diving or collecting. The fisher may use the craft or gear himself or hire it out to other fishers whose payment contributes directly to the livelihood of the fisher. In this respect, crewmembers are also considered as fishers. Handling of the landed catch is done by fish traders who either buy to sell or process before sale. Fishers are involved in the actual catching of fish. Also very closely associated with the fishers’ activities are boat-builders and repairers, gear producers, firewood providers and icemakers.

It is difficult to establish the number of people directly involved in fishing because of the seasonality of the occupation. Many fishers try to evade paying license fees, thus failing to appear in government records. This creates serious weaknesses in the estimates used in policy planning for management of small-scale fisheries. The first survey of the number of fishers was done in 1948 by the Assistant Fish Warden who visited the major fishing villages along the coast and reported 1,019 boats and over 2,500 fishers (Kenya 1950b). In 1961-1963, it was estimated that the number had increased to 5,400 fishers and 1,700 ves-

* The findings in this chapter are from the Fisher Survey at five coastal tracts, unless indicated otherwise.
sels (FAO 1966a). In the late seventies, there were 2,000 boats with 6,000 fishers according to Okidi (1979). FAO (1984) gave an estimated number of 1,800 fishing vessels, while Ardill & Sanders (1991) reported a figure of 6,250 fishers and Wamukoya et al. (1996) mentioned 5,000 officially registered fishers with 2,000 boats. Glaesel (1997a) estimated 6,000 fishers but she also mentioned a much higher estimate of 4,000 boats and 12,000 fishers by the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife. According to the Department of Fisheries (1996-1998) there were about 1,000 small-scale fishers on the coast of Kilifi and Malindi District but the number is likely to have been much higher according to rough estimates of the fishers themselves which arrive at about 2,500 fishers for this part of the coast (see Chapter 6).

The fishers were organized in fishing communities headed by a ‘chairman’ who acted as a link to the government fisheries authorities. It has to be kept in mind that fishers are not really a homogeneous group. The majority of fishers targeted finfish but they used different types of vessels. Others fished for crabs, octopus, and lobster. Some fishers used nets, others traditional traps, spear guns, hand lines or fixed fences. This diversity in craft and gear implied a high disparity in interests and stakes. Since there were no co-management arrangements existent at the time, enforcement of fishing regulations was ensured by sporadic patrols by the District Fisheries Officer. Those who breached regulations were fined or suspended for varying periods or in some cases the authorities simply confiscated and destroyed the offender’s gear.

The active fisher population comprised of boat captains, independent fishers and crewmembers. Boat captains and independent fishers fished as an ‘enterprise’ in that they were responsible for their craft and gear and the risk of loss or damage. Boat captains employed fellow fishers as crewmembers. The crew size including the captain was, on average, 3.6 persons per boat. Nearly all active fishers are men but isolated cases have been reported of women participating in fish capture, notably octopus, prawns and shells (Malleret-King et al. 2003).

Vessels were owned by owner-captains (45%) or hired from a *tajiri* (almost 40%). A *tajiri* is a trader and entrepreneur who buys the catch that fishers bring in and also leases vessels and gear to fishers in return for a share of 20-50% of the daily catch; the remainder is shared among the fishers operating the vessel (Glaesel 1997a). Maintenance of the fishing equipment was the responsibility of