The need for an inland fisheries policy in South Africa: A case study of the North West Province

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Abstract

In contrast to many other African countries, inland fisheries in South Africa are poorly developed and the fish populations in many of the country's 3 000 major dams are under-utilised. While the primary purpose South Africa's dams is to supply water for domestic and agricultural use, there has been an increasing realisation that their fish populations could make a contribution to food security through the establishment of capture fisheries. Historically, the fish in most South African dams have primarily been utilised for recreational fishing purposes, as subsistence use was criminalised by the apartheid regime in all waters except in the former homeland areas. This legacy persists as many of South Africa's rural communities do not have a fishing tradition and there is a lack of an institutional framework to facilitate managed and sustainable access to the fish resource in inland waters. Current utilisation of many inland dams is often complicated by the existence of multiple authorities and interest groups, often with competing agendas. As a result, the economic potential of these water bodies is unknown and often grossly underutilised. Our study outlines a case study of fisheries resources in the North West Province of South Africa that could be used for the creation of income and food security for local communities through the development of subsistence, commercial, and recreational fisheries. The study identifies the lack of guidelines for the development of inland fisheries and the lack of an inland fisheries policy, both at the provincial and national level, as major bottlenecks for the sustainable development of these resources and outlines possible focal areas for intervention.

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