

# ***Selection of the candidate leaders within the communities of Egyptian migrant fishermen in various ports of Greece***

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The project undertaken by ANCE under the title “*Migrant skills transfer in the aquaculture industry: The case of Greece and Egypt*” is part of the EC-UN Joint Migration and Development Initiative (JMIDI) which supports civil society organizations and local authorities to implement pilot-project proposals linking migration with development. In the respective project we engage on migrant skills exchange between sending and receiving countries and we focus our effort on the improvement of the migrants’ skills during their stay in the receiving country.

The Egyptian migrant workforce employed in Greek fisheries serves as our target group. In compliance with the above EC-UN initiative prerogatives linking migration and development, our approved project offers to a selected number of Egyptian fishermen the opportunity to be on-the job trained in aquaculture within volunteering Greek aquaculture Industries and Institutes. We have purposefully focused our “up-skilling” project simultaneously on a priority-development field in Egypt - *aquaculture* - and on an Egyptian migrant group familiar with several aspects of the product/market –*open sea fisheries workers*– in order to maximize the chances for a rapid acquisition of the requested supplementary skills needed within the limited project time and resources framework. This way, we believe we can technically assist and professionally stimulate the targeted migrants to engage in a promising productive activity with a known shortage in skills, upon their future return to Egypt.

In order to effectively disseminate the program’s core objectives, goals and potential benefits within the communities of the Egyptian migrant fishermen in Greece, we have engaged in the task of identifying a number of leaders in each of the regions that host such communities of a considerable volume. The overall target set out in the project’s activities was the identification of 24 leaders geographically scattered around the Greek port-regions. At the preliminary phase – *i.e.: during the initiation field questionnaires phase in each region*- we have tried to identify the potential leaders through inter-personal communication and discussions with the members of each regional migrant community, while in the implementation of the questionnaires we have “built-in” a number of questions that should a-priori characterize “Leadership” attributes among the fisheries sector workers in order to identify relevant candidates through more objective criteria. As the project progressed we made use of the questionnaire data analysis in order to build a pool of interviewed fishermen possessing the characteristic attributes of potential leadership and within this pool, we complemented-validated this objective data selection approach with the personal knowledge and appreciation gained from social interaction with the members of the migrant communities. In general our approach to the selection process was to identify through the questionnaires those individuals that would possess the specific objective attributes and to field-validate their characteristic personality traits and their effective

interests that could enable them to understand and share the ideas and aspirations that shape and drive the project. Because of the very-pilot nature of our project-concept and methodology, we wanted to avoid imposing a deterministic- paternalistic stance during its implementation. Therefore we deemed it important to embed flexibility in our approach through the introduction of certain information-feedback mechanisms that would help us to incrementally redesign aspects of the program and to rethink our future actions through a continuous knowledge-building process attained from contact and increasing collaboration with the potential leaders (as well as with other members of the fishermen community). Migrant leaders progressively identified as above, should serve as a key part in the main nodes of the desired social network that we aim to generate between our team, members of the Egyptian Diaspora in Greece, civil society, local authorities and other key players considered essential contributors, important to the successful implementation of our planned targets. What was *-and still remains-* absolutely necessary, is the building of trust primarily between our team and the potential leaders, a key accomplishment leading to a subsequent trust-relation covering the entire fishermen community or at least *a critical mass* of it. In this brief paper we present the rationale and methodology used to effectively identify the appropriate individuals that would act as community leaders.

## **II. SELECTING THE COMMUNITY LEADERS**

Approaching a migrant community in order to inform them on a project designed for their benefit in absence of the targeted migrants, poses great difficulties as mistrust, suspicion and hesitance could emerge as typical and common-place human behaviour. To overcome these barriers it is advisable to centre the efforts of developing the required social ties around specific members of the community who may have the necessary qualifications that will act as dilutions of mistrust and reservation. Particularly the Egyptian fishermen are basically isolated from the local Greek communities due to the nature of their work, having a small degree of interaction with locals. The idea that an organisation, the national authorities of the host or the sending country or even an international entity (such as the EU or UN) would offer them assistance and possibilities to upgrade their working skills or promote development in their region of origin, should be absent or occupying a minute part of their minds. And this was the case with the targeted community, as these people (a fact that emerged after collecting information on their views and opinions) considered themselves totally forgotten from the Egyptian national authorities while no serious efforts have been made by the Greek state to address their issues and grievances up until now. Adding to the potential “shock” that could be created among the beneficiaries is the conduct of the questionnaire-survey with its success being entirely dependent on the quality of the developed inter-personal ties with the migrant fishermen.

Since leadership is inherent in migrant communities and although the leader’s characteristics may vary within different social contexts, our effort was in a part to detect the established leaders within the Egyptian fishermen communities across the major port-regions of our interest. In cases where the individuals serving already as a kind of leader in those communities could not meet our demands, we attempted to “generate” the required leaders from within the members of the community. The use of information extracted from the questionnaire survey proved invaluable in this case. We stress the fact that our goal at the primary phase was to “discover” the potential leaders, explain in detail the project’s framework, how this will benefit the migrant fishermen and utilise these potential leaders as an interface between us and the main body of the migrant community.

Embarking on this venture brought about the challenge of establishing genuinely trustful inter-personal ties with migrant fishermen starting with their communities situated

near our base in Athens. We made some spontaneous visits to fishing ports nearby Athens namely Varkiza, Lavrio and Salamina. It was considered essential to come in contact initially with their captains and employers, as we wanted the whole process to be diaphanous minimizing the risk of a “collective refusal” of participation in the project. We hypothesised that if the captain-employer would be convinced of our genuine intentions, he would induce acceptance and confidence to his Egyptian crew. This hypothesis was proven by the subsequent experiences to hold true and valid. It was in some cases that the captain was the one to introduce us to the potential leader paving the way for the establishment of the needful relationship. Additionally our visit to Damietta, the birthplace of the majority of the fishermen, proved to be of great service to our goals providing us with the identification of a number of leaders that were major contributors over the entire course of the project. As the project progressed through meetings and through the selection of candidates for on-the job training we had the opportunity to cooperate with several among them and to measure in practice their aptitudes and real interest to exercise inspiring leadership. To the question “which were the sought after qualifications and attributes that these leaders should possess” answers the following chapter of this paper.

### **III. PROFILING THE CANDIDATE MIGRANT COMMUNITY LEADERS**

Since the initiation of the “leadership identification” task, we were in search of the following specific qualifications and characteristics that would be integrated into a single member of the targeted community. In particular the potential leader should:

- Be fairly educated, computer-literate, with a good level of use of the Greek language
- Be open and non-hesitant to the prospects of our project, eager to be involved in the implementation for the benefit of his community
- Possess good communication skills and attitudes and hold recognition among his community as an ethical person, being able to influence the perception of other members towards our project goals and benefits
- Have entrepreneurship qualities and ambitions and if possible experience
- Be aware and willing to discuss and act on the major issues that affect his community, the legal, social and economical processes that shape their lives in the host country
- Enjoy a moderate level of interaction with the local host community.

The above general characteristics were imported in part into the field-questionnaire that was handed out to the Egyptian fishermen and the required leadership attributes, each corresponding to a separate question in the questionnaire, were designed to be identified through the field - questionnaire collection process through our entire target sample population of the 500 Egyptian fishermen. Attributes/compliance criteria were the following:

- Level of Education (Primary, Secondary, Technical/Professional school, University Graduate). We have favoured for leadership choice those individuals who had received Technical/professional or University education.
- Languages (Greek, Arab, and English) and communication type (Read, Write, Oral): Literacy in Arab was a prerequisite together with a good level of oral use of the

Greek language. English was a plus for the purpose of a future international networking but not necessary criterion as a few of them can assume this role .

- Computer basic literacy and possession : In particular we deemed important for a leader not to be just an entry-user in Skype and/or internet but to be a web user and computer literate up to the point of being able to keep files and notes . Indication of computer ownership in Greece was requested
- Total years of work in Greece: A relatively long period of stay in Greece (8 or more years) was required.
- Previous experience in the aquacultures: Having worked in fish-farms in Egypt or in the aquaculture industry in Greece was considered as a positive attribute in view of the content and of the targets of our project concept.
- Legal status: The characteristic of being issued a two-year renewable residence permit (in contrast with the 9-month, contract-duration, non-renewable residence permit issued for circular migration) naturally becomes a power factor for the development of a leadership attitude -a quasi-prerequisite we can assert!!- as those on circular migration contracts live under the fear of losing their next year's job for getting any initiative outside of their strict job tasks !! Much to our regret, at this phase of the project and pending further institutional actions to unbound the circular migration process from the fearful specter of the middlemen, *free two-years residence permit shall remain a key element positively linked to a leadership behavior* as it maximizes the possibility of an immigrant to continue to work in Greek fisheries while feeling and being relatively free to move around and be socially active.
- Preference in aquaculture as an employment alternative to fisheries: An a-priori positive stance on this fact would contribute to the understanding of the potential benefits of the specific JMDI project.
- Number of years expected to continue to work in fisheries in Greece: We needed leader sustainability: i.e.: those whose declared intentions were to prolong their stay and work in Greece at least for the following 3 years or more.
- Work position on ship and on shore residence: Being the acknowledged head of the finely-tuned work group on board, as well as being the signee/lessee member of the group while renting collectively a small apartment in the nearby port, both are attributes indicating leadership reinforcement and often combine with literacy, wisdom and acceptance by the others.
- Family status: Unmarried migrants were in principle to be given a slight preference as they usually adopt a more "risky" stance and they could be available for the entire length of the year, as those single, sometimes prefer to prolong their stay in Greece even during the pause of the fishing season, thus being available all around the year. This is not going without risks though, as they tend to be more mobile and less bounded by family obligations for heavy remittances.
- Broader trade activities: work experience in other relevant trades as an asset (engage in fish sales, work on fish warehouses, work in a shop selling fisheries equipment etc)
- An a-priori positive stand /interest for our up-skilling project. Prior to questionnaire distribution we have distributed in Arabic an extensive explanatory note on our project (a two A4 description of sponsors, aims, targets, activities, conditions

consequences etc). Therefore each participant in our questionnaire was invited to quantify his interest to participate.

- Work and stay in the same port for an extended period: It was essential for the potential leader to have been working and living in the specific port-region for a number of years, establishing the required relationships with his fellowman and local community. We preferred individuals whose mobility inside Greece was and would be limited.

Certain attributes that could not be quantified and measured through the field-questionnaire content analysis such as informal - behavioural communication skills, entrepreneurship attitude, interaction with the local community, overall appreciation on ethical matters as perceived by their community and developed-acquired “ex-post” attitude towards our project, were acquired through personal interaction and thorough discussions with the members of the fishermen community.

**Formal Evaluation Methods**: In order to evaluate the candidate leaders using the questionnaire data, we employed certain methods of Multiple-Criteria Decision Making (MCDM). These were the Simple Additive Weighting (SAW) and the Technique for Order Preference by Similarity to Ideal Solution (TOPSIS) (*The same methods have been applied to the selection of the candidate fishermen to participate in the training courses on aquacultures and details on the methods can be found on the relevant paper for the training courses*). In essence we applied weighting to the above objective criteria corresponding to the importance of each criterion as a leadership attribute.

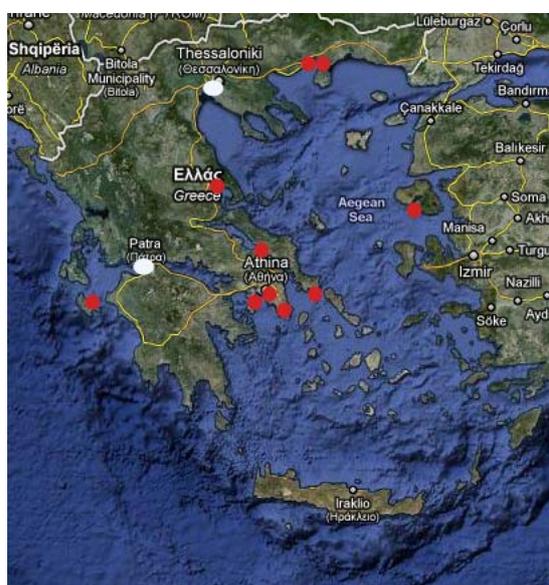
The process has as follows: We come up with a pool of candidate leaders employed in the ports where our field questionnaire survey took already place. Since for the important ports we include in our research, a second or even a third visit takes place (following the initial visits where the questionnaires were handed out and filled-collected), we try to come in contact during the subsequent visits with the members of the community that were identified as possible leaders through the questionnaire data analysis. In this way we assess the suitability for leadership of the candidate migrants and for those cases that seem to possess the required attributes we discuss and “assign” them practically the role of the community leader for the purposes of the project (*they know very well the content, objectives and targets of the project so that they understand their role*). We have to mention that in some cases the selected leader may not be part of the “questionnaire-identified pool”, but simply a latest result of our social interaction with the fishermen community in the various ports visited. This can be so when evident leadership appears among those non-interviewed members of the community as the sampling is random and/or the specific leader may not be present the day of field questionnaire collection. In such cases, we include the person in our questionnaires and we use subjective evaluation through knowledge and experience collected by intermingling with the fishermen community and upon the positive opinion of this last as per above-mentioned informal-qualitative criteria. These were also the cases of certain leaders that egregiously fitted to our candidate profile, usually being “assigned” the role of the community leader from within the community prior to our contact with them.

#### **IV. SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF LEADERS**

Following the procedure and methodology described in the present paper we have identified and selected the required leaders in the following port regions of Greece. As a rule, whenever feasible, because of the potential high mobility of the fishermen community-

especially during the present turbulent period in both countries-, we try to identify to cooperating leaders per community in order to attain a degree of redundancy in our organizational reliability.

- 3 leaders in our designated first pilot-fishing area of Kavala in Northern Greece. (in particular, one leader in the central fishing port of the city and two in the important peripheral fishing port community of Keramoti)
- 2 leaders in our designated second pilot-fishing port of Salamina (small island hosting a most important Egyptian fishermen community traditionally supplying the nearby Athens market)
- 2 leaders in the key trawler-fishing port of Piraeus (located at Keratsini fish wholesale market supplying Athens and Greece )
- 2 leaders in the port of Volos (Central Greece)
- 2 leaders in the port of Chalkida (Evia island, 100km from Athens)
- 1 leader in the port of Karystos (South part of Evia island)
- 1 leader in the port of Varkiza (Attica, 40km from Athens)
- 1 leader in the island of Zakynthos (Ionian Sea)
- 1 leader in the island of Lesbos (Aegean Sea)
- 2 leaders in Ezbet- El-Borg (Damietta)



Leadership selection and development is still pending in the designated areas of Salonika and Patras. In the first because of the wild strikes that has impeded our activities and in the second because of attrition and non redundancy (one leader relocated in Zakynthos). The locations of the various fishermen communities in which leaders have been identifies can be seen on the map on the right (*red=communities with identified leaders, white=communities with leaders to be identified in short time*)

The selected migrants were informed in detail about the project goals and targets, the ongoing progress and the major accomplishments and events when these occurred. Through their efforts our work was practically disseminated to every major designated fishermen community in Greece along with various minor ones. The identified leaders in Damietta, proved to be extremely useful as our ideas and aspirations reached and spread not only in Greece but all-around the original nucleus of the fishermen community in Egypt. Consequently we have engaged in a task of sustaining and enforcing our interaction and connection with the identified leaders during the life-cycle of the project so that to turn a number of them to practical participants in our core team. After trust has built up with the migrant communities largely through the actions of the leaders, the specified targets were accomplished with less obstructions and hesitation and -more recently- with a mounting degree of mobilization and initiative. It is

worth noting that after the Kavala Information day we have started and we continue receiving emails and telephones from various fishermen scattered all around Greece requesting details on the project and information on how to participate in the training courses. Along with the above came a “wave” of requests on specific issues that had to do with unprecedented salary reductions, work accidents, health and social insurance e.t.c.. It was not our project responsibility to provide such services although we engaged in a search for the relevant information needed to consult them on how to proceed with their grievances. The above process generated ideas on how to shape and design a forthcoming project dealing with migration and social integration of the Egyptian fishermen in Greece and development in their sending regions.

## **V. CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER WORK**

Implementing our methodology, a number of community leaders among the Egyptian migrant fishermen community in Greece are identified and with the essential part of them we have by now developed solidly established relationships of cooperation. Our efforts of building up this social network proved invaluable as they pay-out for the effective, successful and -above all- participant implementation of the project. The leaders are spatially distributed in most of the major fishing ports of Greece where the migrant communities possess a considerable volume. Migrant fishermen community leaders are in essence individuals that assist in the organization and cohesion of their immigrant communities and educate – introduce its members on rights, opportunities and effective workarounds on certain grievances, opening-up their views and empowering in this way their active participation in the socio-political-cultural context of each host country. They also assist their community to keep organized links with their community of origin and are capable to work-out potentially links between local host communities and their communities of origin. We have employed a synthesis of objective criteria and personal knowledge gained from interacting with the communities in order to identify those leaders for the purposes of the project. The methodology used was proven to be effective and sound. We have contributed to the identification and formation of a form of social human capital that has initially learned cautiously about our goals and mission then has actively endorsed and presently advocates on a par value with us the JMDI project goals within the specific migrant labor communities. We consider that it is very premature for the aspirations of such a growing leadership to be left aside and alone at this very seed-incubating phase. This leadership must be reinforced – consolidated through concrete material and training actions and its empowerment within its migrant community and the local hosting environment. Its motivation and its increasingly legitimated position with both, raise positive perspectives for the continuation and the further development of this momentum with the promotion of activities that will deal with (a) the adoption for solution of specific migration problem issues linked to activation of the local community and civil societies and (b) the promotion of entrepreneurial development issues for the Egyptian fishermen community per se and for the effective guidance of their economies-remittances in their region of origin in Damietta, Egypt, preferably with the supporting knowledge assistance of volunteering organizations of the host country.