Strengthening Fisheries Management through Corporate Social Responsibility: A Mauritian Perspective

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The sustainable management of fisheries has become one of the most pressing challenges facing the Indian Ocean Region. Fisheries are fundamental to food security, employment, economic development and the livelihoods of millions of people. However, overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, habitat degradation and the growing impacts of climate change have accelerated the depletion of marine resources. Recognising these challenges, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) has identified Fisheries Management as one of its priority areas through the IORA Action Plan 2022–2027. While governments remain the primary custodians of fisheries governance, sustainable fisheries management requires a broader, collaborative approach. In this regard, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) presents an opportunity to complement public policies by encouraging the private sector to contribute actively to marine conservation, community resilience and sustainable fisheries.

Mauritius offers an ideal context for this discussion. As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), the country depends heavily on the ocean for its economic prosperity and social well-being. Fisheries contribute to food security, provide employment to artisanal and commercial fishers, and support the country's seafood processing and export industries. In addition, Mauritius has positioned itself as a regional seafood hub while promoting the Blue Economy as a pillar of national development. Yet these economic opportunities are increasingly threatened by declining fish stocks, coral bleaching, rising sea temperatures and extreme weather events associated with climate change. These realities highlight the need for innovative partnerships that extend beyond government regulation.

Mauritius is particularly well placed to demonstrate how Corporate Social Responsibility can strengthen fisheries management. Unlike many countries where CSR remains largely voluntary, Mauritius has institutionalised CSR through a legal framework that encourages companies to invest in projects that promote sustainable development and social welfare. This provides an opportunity to channel private-sector resources towards marine conservation and fisheries sustainability, thereby reinforcing national policies and regional commitments under IORA.

One area where CSR could have significant impact is the conservation and restoration of marine ecosystems. Healthy coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds provide essential breeding and nursery habitats for many commercially important fish species. Businesses operating in sectors that depend on healthy marine ecosystems, particularly hotels, tourism operators, seafood exporters and financial institutions, could allocate CSR funding towards coral restoration, mangrove rehabilitation and coastal ecosystem protection. Such investments would not only contribute to biodiversity conservation but also safeguard the natural resources upon which these industries ultimately depend.

CSR could also strengthen the resilience of artisanal fishing communities. Small-scale fishers are among the most vulnerable to declining fish stocks and climate-related disruptions. CSR programmes could finance training in sustainable fishing practices, provide safer and more environmentally friendly fishing equipment, and support alternative livelihood opportunities during closed fishing seasons. Investment in skills development, value-added fish processing and women's cooperatives would further diversify household incomes while reducing pressure on marine resources. Such initiatives would align closely with IORA's emphasis on capacity building and inclusive economic development.

Another important contribution of CSR lies in promoting scientific research and innovation. Effective fisheries management depends on reliable data regarding fish stocks, migration patterns and ecosystem health. Universities, research institutions and government agencies often face financial and technical constraints in conducting long-term marine research. Through CSR initiatives, private companies could support fisheries monitoring programmes, marine scientific research, digital traceability systems and awareness campaigns promoting sustainable seafood consumption. Improved data collection would enhance evidence-based policymaking while increasing transparency across seafood supply chains.

In Mauritius, the tourism industry also has an important role to play. The country's international reputation as a tropical island destination relies heavily on healthy lagoons, coral reefs and marine biodiversity. Hotels and tourism operators therefore have a direct economic interest in protecting coastal ecosystems. CSR investments in beach clean-ups, marine education programmes, reef restoration projects and community conservation initiatives would generate environmental, social and economic benefits simultaneously. Such efforts would demonstrate that marine conservation is not simply an environmental obligation but also a strategic investment in the long-term sustainability of Mauritius' tourism sector.

The objectives of the IORA Action Plan 2022–2027 provide an appropriate regional framework within which these partnerships can flourish. The Fisheries Support Unit, hosted by the Sultanate of Oman, together with the Core Group on Fisheries Management, seeks to strengthen regional cooperation, build institutional capacity and promote the sustainable utilisation of marine resources. CSR initiatives implemented at national level could complement these regional efforts by mobilising additional financial resources, encouraging innovation and fostering partnerships between governments, businesses, academia and civil society. Mauritius could further champion the integration of CSR into regional fisheries management discussions, positioning itself as a leader in collaborative ocean governance within the Indian Ocean Region.

Ultimately, sustainable fisheries management cannot be achieved through government regulation alone. The complexity of modern fisheries challenges requires shared responsibility among public institutions, private enterprises, local communities and regional organisations. Mauritius possesses the legal framework, institutional capacity and economic incentives necessary to demonstrate how Corporate Social Responsibility can become an effective complement to fisheries governance. By aligning private-sector investment with national priorities and IORA's regional objectives, Mauritius can strengthen food security, enhance the resilience of coastal communities and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the Indian Ocean's marine resources. In doing so, it would offer a practical example of how collaborative governance can transform fisheries management from a regulatory obligation into a shared commitment to sustainable development.