

Egypt Hopes to Lure More Fishermen to High Dam Lake

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CAIRO — As a new frontier it would seem to hold precious little allure even for the hardest of pioneers. Summertime centigrade temperatures soar well into the 40s, the desert land is full of poisonous snakes and scorpions, and there is almost nothing in the way of infrastructure.

This is what awaits would-be settlers on the shores of High Dam Lake. Upper Egypt's huge artificial body of water formed by the Aswan High Dam. Yet Egypt wants to press ahead with developing and populating this singularly inhospitable region because it contains important fishing, agricultural and mining potential.

Spearheading the development drive are some 3,000 fishermen whose small boats ply the lake's waters and who are now, with the assistance of the international relief organization, CARE, establishing small fishermen's shelters complete with farming and livestock raising. The government hopes these shelters will form the nucleus of future, permanent lakeshore settlement.

Already a total of 24 shelters have been built under the CARE project, which is also contributing to the agricultural development of the region by supplying fishermen with tools, pumping sets and pipes, fertilizers and pesticides. A medical boat has been provided for the lake, with a second such boat planned for the next phase of the project.

Lake fishermen, who come from towns and villages north of the High Dam, were originally hired to fish the lake for periods of about five months of the year. But by now, fishing on the lake has become the



ASWAN — From a peak of 7,000, the number of fishermen working Aswan's High Dam Lake has dwindled to around 3,000.

primary occupation for many of them and, despite the harsh climatic conditions, a number of the fishermen have expressed a willingness to settle there permanently. According to a recent survey carried out by the Aswan Regional Plan social unit, some 78 percent of a sample of 510 fishermen said they would settle permanently in their fishing areas,

provided they could be assured of reasonable services.

Indeed, it is the current lack of basic services that is partly blamed for a decline in the lake's fishermen population from 7,000 in the late 1970s to around 3,000 today. Fewer fishermen, of course, means a smaller catch. Consequently, the need to improve their conditions becomes

self-evident if Egypt is to make full use of the lake as a valuable food source.

The new shelters on the lake shores have been built with Nubian sandstone, which is plentifully available. A local loam, called *tafta*, is used as mortar. Each shelter costs between E£8,000 and E£10,000, according to CARE officials.

The typical shelter contains one or two rooms for sleeping quarters, storage rooms for fishing nets and a courtyard. The courtyard provides a place for the fishermen to repair their nets. In some cases, smaller buildings have been added to the shelters for storing those species of fish, such as Nile dogfish, which can be salted and thus do not have to be hurriedly put aboard one of the 90 carrier boats which take the catch in ice boxes to a fish processing plant at the north end of the lake near the dam.

In the agricultural component of the CARE project, attempts to develop vegetable gardens have been made at every shelter site to supplement the fishermen's diet, which was notably short on fresh fruit and vegetables. Fruit trees have been planted at most sites and CARE officials note that some fishermen have even started raising goats. Tree saplings act as windbreakers and provide shade from the sun.

Much of the land around the lake is fertile, and the High Dam Lake Development Authority in Aswan estimates that 68,800 hectares could eventually be farmed, with water pumped from the lake for irrigation. The CARE project has provided diesel pumps for the purpose, but a system for their repair and maintenance has yet to be established.

Aquaculture, the natural restocking of the lake's fish population, will be a major thrust of CARE's activity on the lake in coming years. This is being carried out in

cooperation with the fishery management centre in Aswan. During the past year, fish restocking projects have been implemented near the shelter site of Sukar and East Madiq in the central region of the lake. Other areas are being selected and fishermen will be trained in fish restocking techniques.

Under the restocking programme, efforts will be made to increase the population of *Tilapia nilotica* in the lake. This popular species, *bolli*, has been declining in fishermen's catches relative to the less popular *Tilapia galilae*. CARE officials note that in the mid-1970s *Tilapia nilotica* accounted for more than 80 percent of the fresh fish caught in the lake, but by 1983 the proportion of *nilotica* caught had decreased to only 42 percent of the total catch.

The health component of the CARE project is all important if the fishermen are to be persuaded to settle permanently on the lake. At present, quarterly medical trips are made by the CARE boat to shelter sites. A second CARE boat will enable medical teams to increase the frequency of their contact with the fishermen and provide diagnosis and treatment of common medical and dental problems. Basic first aid training is also planned for the next phase of the project. A third medical boat is going to be provided by the fishermen's General Services Society, an organization which is financed with a levy on the lake's fish catch.

CARE-Egypt's budget for its low-cost but effective High Dam Lake activities total E£1.7 million for the next three years. Of this sum, CARE and USAID are contributing E£1.1 million, with E£400,000 and E£200,000 coming from the High Dam Lake Development Authority and the fishermen's General Services Society respectively.

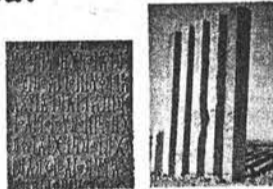
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