

# Towards an enabling environment

The text of the FAO paper COFI/2005/5 *Supporting Small-scale Fisheries Through an Enabling Environment*

## Summary

This paper explores the importance of the context in which small-scale fisheries operate, and argues that only through the creation of an enabling environment can these fisheries fulfil their potential to contribute to reaching the important goals of poverty alleviation and food security as stipulated in the World Food Summit and the Millennium Declaration. There are a number of strategies that can be employed to facilitate small-scale fisheries operations, including initiatives aimed at making changes to fisheries policy and legislation, improving non-fisheries policy and legislative environment, tailoring fisheries management regimes, facilitating financial arrangements, improving information, developing human capacity and making markets work for small-scale fishers.

## Introduction and background

1. At its Twenty-fifth Session in 2003, the Committee on Fisheries “strongly advocated that more efforts be made to support the small-scale fisheries sector, both inland and marine” and requested that technical guidelines on increasing the contribution of small-scale fisheries to food security and poverty alleviation be prepared. The Committee indicated that “such guidelines should, *inter alia*, stress the importance of national fisheries development strategies that promote good governance and inclusiveness....”.

2. Practical strategies are outlined in this paper, the adoption and implementation of which could significantly improve the conditions in which small-scale fisheries operate. Governments and non-governmental stakeholders, as well as the international community, are encouraged to improve these conditions.

3. An explanation of key terms and concepts is provided at the outset to justify the facilitating of the overall conditions in which small-scale fishers operate. Some possible strategies are then suggested, which could be adopted and implemented by stakeholders and the international community. The document concludes by inviting the Committee to address a list of suggested actions.

## Key terms and concepts

4. The FAO Advisory Committee on Fisheries Research (ACFR) Working Party on Small-scale Fisheries, at its Second Session held in Bangkok, Thailand, in November 2003, agreed on a vision statement and a characterization of small-scale fisheries as follows:

Small-scale fisheries can be broadly characterized as a dynamic and evolving sector employing labour-intensive harvesting, processing and distribution technologies to exploit marine and inland water fishery resources. The activities of this subsector, conducted full- or part-time, or just seasonally, are often targeted on supplying fish and fishery products to local and domestic markets, and for subsistence consumption. Export-oriented production, however, has increased in many small-scale fisheries during the last one to two decades because of greater market integration and globalization. While typically men are engaged in fishing and women in fish processing and marketing, women are also known to engage in near-shore harvesting activities and men are known to engage in

fish marketing and distribution. Other ancillary activities such as net-making, boatbuilding, engine repair and maintenance, etc., can provide additional fishery-related employment and income opportunities in marine and inland fishing communities.

Small-scale fisheries operate at widely differing organizational levels ranging from self-employed single operators through informal micro-enterprises to formal sector businesses. This subsector, therefore, is not homogenous within and across countries and regions, and attention to this fact is warranted when formulating strategies and policies for enhancing its contribution to food security and poverty alleviation.

5. The **vision for small-scale fisheries** is one in which the contribution of these fisheries to sustainable development is fully realized. This vision affirms that:

- they not be marginalized and that their contribution to national economies and food security be recognized, valued and enhanced;
- fishers, fishworkers and other stakeholders have the ability to participate in decisionmaking, be empowered to do so, and have increased capability and human capacity, thereby achieving dignity and respect; and
- poverty and food insecurity do not persist; and that social, economic and ecological systems be managed in an integrated and sustainable manner, thereby reducing conflict.

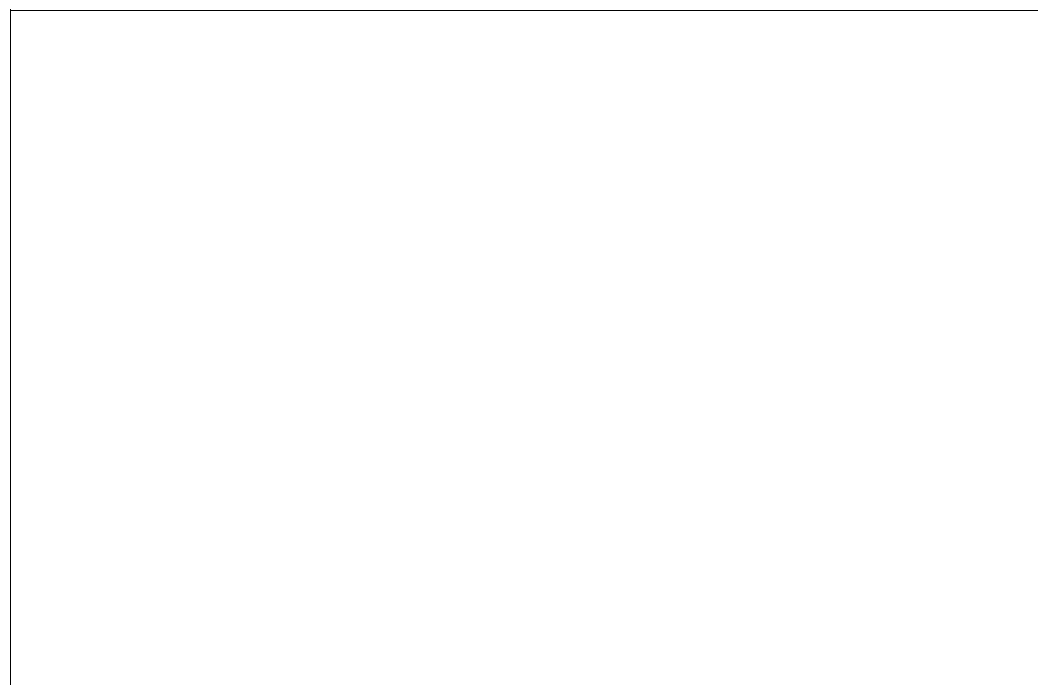
6. Furthermore, the ACFR Working Party on Human Capacity Development, in April 2004, considered an **enabling environment** as a societal context that allows for development processes to take place. Some of the features that define 'enabling environment' are coherent sector policies and strategies as well as co-ordination across sectors, good levels of human capacity development and

organizational development, good governance, and a lack of conflict.

*Why is an enabling environment so important for small-scale fisheries?*

7. Small-scale fisheries play an important role with respect to such key issues as poverty reduction and food and nutritional security. Their contribution, at the macroeconomic level, is seemingly very small in comparison to other sectors, such as agriculture, and only in small island developing States (SIDS) economies and those of a few countries is gross domestic product (GDP) significantly increased by the contribution of the small-scale fisheries sector. However, the role of small-scale fisheries in the household and local (community) economies may be quite substantial. Through direct and indirect food security mechanisms, income and employer multipliers effects, small-scale fisheries and related activities play a significant role at the micro-levels, especially for the poorest households who depend more heavily on these activities. At household level, small-scale fisheries represent the difference between starvation and food security and fishing becomes the 'bank in the water'.

8. Given the appropriate conditions, small-scale fisheries can contribute significantly to pro-poor growth, in particular through its capacity to play the role of buffer and labour safety valve for increasing rural and unskilled population. In addition, small-scale fisheries, through their redistributive capacity, could be a very powerful way to reduce rural inequity and set up the institutional and economic conditions of a pro-poor growth for those who are chronically unable to engage in the productive economy. This may, in turn, favour faster economic growth, which can then trickle down to the poorest households. Finally, small-scale fisheries, fish processing and trade provide the population with important and sometimes crucial safety-net alternatives as part of a multi-activity, reducing vulnerability and risk. In terms of livelihood-based strategy toward sustainable development, small-scale fisheries play the role of substitute and/or complement to other



economic activities to help the households sustain their standard of living in the absence of formal unemployment and/or insurance schemes.

9. Despite these crucial roles and contributions of small-scale fisheries, the sector is still largely neglected by decision-makers and planners and absent from discussion relating to national poverty reduction strategies. The successful creation of favourable conditions would enhance small-scale fisheries' contribution to the themes/subjects/aspects alluded to in paragraphs 6 and 7 above but also allow the sector to contribute to both (a) ensuring implementation of the Code of Conduct and the appropriate International Plans of Actions, and (b) poverty reduction and food security, two issues highlighted in the goals of the Millennium Declaration, and particularly relevant to goal 1 (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger).

**What can be done?**

*Making changes to fisheries policy and legislation*

10. Frequently, small-scale fishers and fishworkers, and especially when they are poor, are unable to initiate and carry out the changes that would be to their own benefit, and this is because they are economically, socially and politically marginalized. They therefore require

special protection and assistance. Fisheries policy must provide a long-term vision for small-scale fisheries (rather than just a short-term development plan) through the clear specification of objectives and policy tools employed to achieve these objectives. Legislation should provide the mechanisms for implementation and enforcement of these objectives. Together, they will provide the overall framework in which small-scale fisheries can operate and they must, therefore, be formulated to include specific ways of supporting small-scale fisheries; it is not sufficient just to control activities of an industrial nature (although this may be important). And because small-scale fisheries have significant potential to alleviate poverty and food insecurity, unlocking this potential also requires policy and legislation that is specifically targeted at the poor and food insecure.

11. It may be necessary to consider how small-scale fishers and fishworkers are defined in legislation. A broad definition of artisanal/small-scale fisheries is required which, for example, includes fishworkers/fishers involved in processing and marketing activities so that their work can be formally recognized. A failure to do so can have adverse implications for accessing financial assistance, membership of unions or organizations, etc., and can disadvantage women, whose

involvement in many segments of small-scale fisheries but particularly post-harvest activities, is significant.

12. Policy and legislation supporting small-scale fisheries may cover a wide range of issues, and the following should be considered for their appropriateness in different situations:

- management measures specifying seasonal or area restrictions for foreign/domestic/industrial activity;
- priority access by small-scale fishers to coastal land and near-shore areas of sea;
- security of rights to resources more generally. This is especially important for poor small-scale fishers, whose rights are often easily eroded in the absence of such legislation;
- community-based fisheries management and co-management;
- the ability to make local bylaws which can support particular local circumstances;
- movement of migratory fishermen and access to fish resources

(although care needs to be taken over migratory rights coming into conflict with indigenous fishing rights);

- bycatch utilization in industrial fisheries, and support for the small-scale post-harvest sector and ensuring access to catch by small-scale processors and traders;
- safety at sea (small-scale fishermen may be especially at risk to accidents due to type of vessels being used, so legislation should focus specifically on safety at sea in small-scale fisheries);
- rights of small-scale fishers to access straddling stocks, recognizing the fact that in many countries, small-scale fishers now operate far offshore; and
- a process for redress by small-scale fishers and fishworkers, for example, the appeals process.

13. Including small-scale fishers and fishworkers (and especially the poor and food insecure) in policy and legislative processes is also likely to maximize the potential for a supportive policy and legislative environment that reflects fishers' real needs. Improving such processes can be achieved through:

- more consideration of the stakeholders to be involved;
  - formalization of processes to ensure appropriate involvement by small-scale fishers;
  - careful planning to allow sufficient time and budgets for wide stakeholder involvement to become a reality;
  - working with small-scale fisheries organizations and unions to strengthen the ability of their representatives to participate meaningfully;
  - adaptation of workshop tools to cater for different educational levels and experience of technical issues, and to encourage contributions to be made by small-scale fishers at policy meetings;
  - formalization of methods to ensure transparency; and
  - decentralization involvement, and accountability, by bringing decisionmaking closer to the people.
- Improving non-fisheries policy and legislative environment*
14. Small-scale fisheries are impacted by policies outside the sector, and those wishing to support small-scale fisheries should strive to engage in policy and legislative processes in other sectors so as to influence them in favour of small-scale fisheries. Some important examples include:
- national policies and legislation relating to public sector reform and decentralization which may be supportive of co-management, and devolution of policy formation and management responsibilities to small-scale fisheries communities;
  - national policies on poverty contained in national poverty reduction strategies and PRSPs, which may include reference to, or impact on, small-scale fisheries, poverty reduction in coastal communities, and gender and equity issues;
  - national policies and legislation on trade enabling the ability of small-scale fisheries to export fisheries products;
  - national policies and legislation on finance and credit that support the activities of small-scale fishers;
  - national level policy and legislation on social security, labour rights and migration;
  - supportive national policy/regulations on co-operatives and organizations;
  - national policy and legislation on human rights such as the right to food, the right to earn a living, the right not to be discriminated against, and the right to education, either through specific legislation on issues which will support such rights or by enshrining such rights in constitutions, to which all national legislation is subsidiary;
  - policy and legislation in other sectors, for example, environment, water and forestry, to address marine pollution, water levels in inland water bodies, and mangrove deforestation, respectively;
  - local policies and legislation on planning and infrastructure provision acting as a catalyst for small-scale fisheries where they facilitate business activity and do not disproportionately benefit the better-off, larger-scale interests; and
  - local policies on granting and protecting rights of ownership to coastal/shoreline land. (Many small-scale fishers live in conditions of poverty because they do not have legally recognized tenure to the land on which they settle. With insecure tenure, fishing communities have no

incentive to invest in improving their housing conditions and are often found in 'unofficial' settlements that lack access to basic State-provided infrastructure, for example, schools, clinics, water drainage and sanitation.)

#### *Tailoring fisheries management regimes*

15. A management regime supportive of small-scale fishers can be created through a number of means. As alluded to above in considering changes to fisheries policy and legislation, one way is to define and enforce a rights-based management system, and one ensuring preferential access for small-scale fishers and/or the case of passive gear in areas in which they can operate (for instance, through zoning or seasonal trawl bans). Preferential access can be also achieved, for instance, through the use of artificial reefs (recommended in the Code of Conduct) since, in addition to creating new habitats for fish, they hinder industrial trawling in inshore areas.

16. Decentralized management responsibilities assigned to the local level (where local capacity exists) can improve the representation and accountability of the management system, thereby enhancing the chance for small-scale fishers to see their needs and priorities integrated into the decision-making process.

17. Co-management is also likely to improve the conditions of small-scale fisheries for similar reasons. Given recent pilot studies and research on co-management suggesting its benefits, there is now an urgent need to mainstream these activities where they have been successful, or have the potential to be so. This can be achieved if there is the political will and incentive for central government and fisheries departments to relinquish control over resource management, and if action plans are well specified. Action plans for co-management should pay attention to, *inter alia*: existing management and decision-making processes; the different management functions required of different parties under a co-management regime; necessary human capacity

developments; ensuring support at the local level; the costs and sources of finance to ensure sustainability; strong representation of all interest groups; and an appropriate policy and legal framework. With respect to this latter point, if co-management initiatives are to be successful, basic issues of government action to establish supportive legislation, policies, rights and authority structures must be addressed. Policies and legislation need to: articulate jurisdiction and control; provide legitimacy to property rights and decision-making arrangements; define and clarify local responsibility and authority; support local enforcement and accountability mechanisms; ensure that rights are provided for under the co-management regime; and provide fisher groups or organizations the legal right to organize and make arrangements related to their needs.

#### *Facilitating financial arrangements*

18. Fisheries Ministries and Departments, as well as Ministries of Finance and national treasuries, must ensure sufficient and specific budget allocations if strategies to support small-scale fisheries are to be successfully implemented. This might include funding for inshore monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) of industrial fishing activities and recruitment of small-scale fisheries experts, as well as adequate financial support for social security, and appropriate technologies and practices within the small-scale sector. In providing funds to support small-scale fisheries, it is also necessary to look outside of fisheries sector budgets. At the national level, ensuring the inclusion of small-scale fisheries in national poverty reduction strategies can help access poverty-related funding. Support for small-scale fisheries can also be provided indirectly at the local level, for example, through support/finance for local administrations or NGOs working in fisheries and more generally in rural development. Decentralized management of funds may help to enhance their effectiveness in supporting the small-scale sector.

19. There are moves towards greater 'market discipline' in the sector as a way of contributing towards a transition to

responsible fisheries. This is evidenced by recent focus on issues such as withdrawal of subsidies, strengthening of use rights, substitution of grants with loans, and cost recovery programmes with greater emphasis on capture of resource rents (although this may be less relevant for small-scale fisheries than for industrial fisheries). The move to responsible fisheries will, in many cases, have significant impacts on small-scale fishers. As a result, targeted assistance for small-scale fisheries may be necessary to ease the impacts of this transition. For example, while subsidies and wider incentives (in fisheries and other sectors) which may lead to overexploitation should be guarded against, incentives and subsidies should be considered where appropriate but their use requires careful justification and specification of the period over which they are to be used. Subsidies might be appropriate if they enhance or diversify livelihoods without leading to increased fishing capacity or trade distortions, or are used to facilitate a structural change to assist with the move towards responsible fishing.

20. Many small-scale fishery enterprises would need access to credit or seed capital to start. Both capital investment and working capital loans are required. This is all more important in the context of the application of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries in small-scale fisheries, when small-scale enterprises

may need to acquire appropriate gear and adopt proper fishing methods, invest in value addition to make better use of scarce resources and, if necessary, move from capture fisheries to aquaculture or non-fishing enterprises.

21. Informal/traditional credit schemes have positive attributes in terms of providing access to capital or assets because they are 'closer' to the users, more flexible, and more adapted to their needs. However, in the absence of schemes run on a collective basis, these informal schemes tend to lack transparency and accountability, and moneylenders typically charge high interest rates and often enter into exploitive relationships. As a result, establishing rural credit institutions in the form of co-operatives, or encouraging commercial banks to provide cheap/subsidized credit to fishers, can be used as a strategy to support small-scale fishers. However, evidence from evaluations suggests that many formal credit programmes are often unsuccessful, both in terms of the viability of lending institutions, and the ability of intended beneficiaries to access credit. Some reasons for these failures include borrower-unfriendly products and procedures, inflexibilities and delays, insufficient levels of collateral held by the poor, high transaction costs as opposed to interest rates (both legitimate and illegal), and high rates of non-repayment.

22. The problems of informal credit markets and rural credit institutions discussed above have led to a growing recognition of the importance of microfinance as a crucial development tool for poverty alleviation. Microfinance is the provision of a broad range of financial services such as deposits/savings, loans, payment services, money transfers and insurance, and is characterized most commonly by small loans. Globally, women constitute the majority of microfinance clients, possibly because of their better repayment records. Targeting women in microfinance programmes in fisheries is equivalent to investing in their empowerment and improving livelihood diversification and well-being of their families and communities. FAO recently published a Technical Paper (Technical Paper 440: *Microfinance in Fisheries and Aquaculture: Guidelines and Case Studies*, Tietze and Villareal, 2003) that provides a contextualization of microfinance, and a consideration of lending and savings models. It contains many practical suggestions that should be followed about ways of ensuring that micro-finance initiatives are successful.

#### *Improving information*

23. Facilitating optimal conditions for small-scale fishers depends on access to good information on which appropriate policies and strategies can be based. This

requires improved data collection, as well as further research on small-scale fisheries that is participatory in nature and seeks to learn from indigenous knowledge.

24. Information systems are also needed that are low on data requirements. These systems should, however, monitor and evaluate small-scale fisheries and levels of poverty, vulnerability and food security in fishing communities. Improvements in systems of information exchange can also increase the ability of those in fisheries and non-fisheries administrations to appreciate the importance of small-scale fisheries. But getting relevant information across to the right parties in the most effective manner requires planning and budgeting for carefully planned communication strategies. The resulting impacts of successfully demonstrating the importance of small-scale fisheries might, for example, be the inclusion of small-scale fisheries in national poverty reduction strategies.

#### *Developing capacity*

25. Once appropriate information is available on which to base policies and strategies, they must be successfully implemented. Successful implementation can be underpinned by a process of human capacity development, which is "the process by which individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, and societies develop their abilities both



individually and collectively to set and achieve objectives, perform functions, solve problems and to develop the means and conditions required to enable this process" (FAO Fisheries Report No. 745, Rome, FAO, 2004).

26. There are four levels of human capacity development. It is desirable to conduct, at each level, a capacity needs assessment followed by training needs analysis and curriculum development for key capacity needs, and then selection and use of appropriate delivery mechanisms. Human capacity development at all levels may require a focus not just on fisheries-specific skills and knowledge, but also on improvements in more general management skills such as conflict resolution, planning, administration, etc.

27. For capacity development in the overall environment in which the fisheries sector operates, a focus on good governance is especially relevant. The key aspects of good governance would include inclusiveness, lawfulness, transparency, and accountability. At the sector/network level, increasing the ability to ensure coherent sector policies and strategies, as well as co-ordination across sectors, can enhance capacity. At the organizational/institutional and individual levels, there is the need for (a) more fisheries experts specializing in small-scale fisheries in fisheries departments and Ministries, donor agencies, and non-governmental organizations, (b) a greater emphasis on social, economic, and livelihoods skills in such organizations while not neglecting the natural sciences, including resource assessment, and (c) enhanced capacity in organizations representing and working for small-scale fisheries, for example, those concerned with technical fisheries management issues, social welfare, credit/savings and marketing, and/or political negotiation or lobbying.

#### *Making markets work for small-scale fishers*

28. When considering 'markets', it is important to consider both 'input' and 'output' markets. Input markets can be made to work for small-scale fisheries through some of the means discussed above, for example, micro-finance to

address issues of credit and enabling migration legislation to address issues of labour requirements. Other input markets, especially those for imported items, need to be carefully monitored to assess their impacts on small-scale fisheries, with logistical, and, in some cases, legal, interventions ensuring easy and equitable access to the inputs needed. Examples might include encouraging good competition between companies supplying small-scale fishers, facilitating the swift movement of imported items through customs, or facilitating transport of input items for sale in remote locations.

29. In terms of output markets, both domestic and international markets can offer huge benefits for small-scale fisheries. A first step would be to raise awareness about the importance of marketing and trade of fish and fishery products produced by a small-scale fisheries as a component of fisheries (and other sectoral) policies and programmes. Such a step is especially needed given (a) the strong historical emphasis on export-led growth from industrial fisheries, and (b) the important gender component of post-harvest activities.

30. Another step would be to recognize the global changes in fish trade, which are currently under way and will facilitate change in the overall conditions of small-scale fishers. Such global changes include: rapidly increasing levels of production in developing countries and increasing net receipts of foreign exchange; more fish and fish products being sold in fresh, chilled or frozen form, as opposed to traditional forms of preservation in developing countries of salting or drying; and increases in certification and branding based on environmental and/or social criteria as evidenced by Corporate Social Responsibility, the Marine Stewardship Council and many other initiatives (although their overall market share is still small).

31. Although such changes provide positive opportunities for small-scale fisheries, they may also impact negatively on some of those small-scale operators traditionally involved in fish trade. In many countries, changes have resulted in greater potential profits, and new

investment and technology in the catching sector are resulting in concentration of ownership in fewer hands, and landings at fewer landing sites. Likewise, the greater use of ice and sale of fresh and chilled products, coupled with improved transport, has important implications for traditional processors and those supplying inputs such as fuel wood, traditional packaging materials and so on, to such activities. These developments have also increased the ability of external buyers to access fresh fish from remote landing centres, increasing competition with traditional traders and processors. There may be gender impacts too, with women especially affected by concentration of ownership, where traditionally they had gained access to supplies of fish from husbands working in the catching sector.

32. Appropriate initiatives to ensure that small-scale fisheries can respond to opportunities resulting from global trends can involve lobbying for, and providing information on, changes to international trade policy and regulations, strategic marketing advice to assist with expansion into new markets based on the specific requirements of those markets, technological and practical support to facilitate greater levels of fresh/chilled sales, and assistance for compliance with certification criteria. Capacity development is also required so that small-scale fishworkers, and especially women and the very poor, can adapt/mobilize to minimize any potential negative impacts of global trends and local situations.

33. On a national level, ensuring reliable access by processors/traders to both fish and markets is essential. Access to fish by small-scale traders and processors can be enhanced through support for sustainable resource exploitation, coupled with support for the small-scale catching sector, as small-scale processors depend, to a large extent, on this sector for supplies of product. Access to fish can also be enhanced through greater levels of bycatch utilization from industrial fisheries. Appropriate facilities at harbours and landing sites where fish can be purchased can also increase access by small-scale traders and processors,

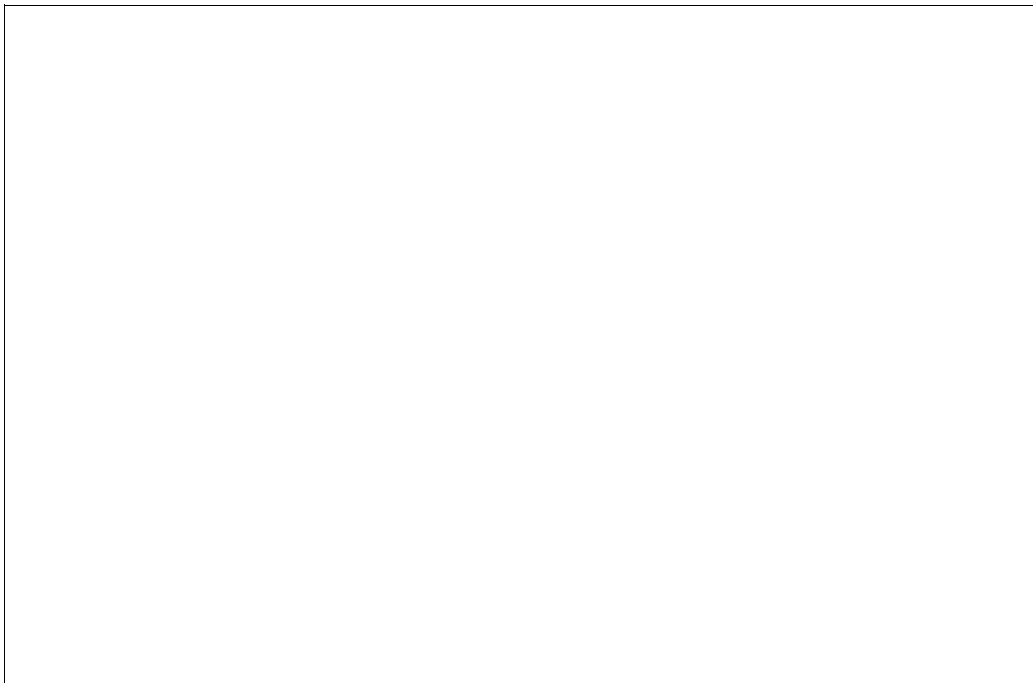
particularly women, to fish. Such facilities include running water, storage facilities, sanitation and toilets, and night shelters.

34. Improving access to markets by poor traders can be achieved through initiatives that support appropriate technologies in processing, preservation, transport and storage, all of which can help to increase value addition, and reduce fish spoilage and wastage. Free movement of fish products without unnecessary harassment at checkpoints and borders is another important issue for many small-scale traders and can be facilitated through greater awareness of current problems and overall improvements in levels of governance. Provision of appropriate facilities at market sites for traders themselves (for example, toilets, running water, childcare facilities, market stalls at low rentals, etc.) is as important in ensuring access to markets as it is to ensuring access to fish.

#### **Conclusion**

34. It should be recalled that the Expert Consultation (convened on the recommendation of the Twenty-fifth Session of COFI on the Role of Small-scale Fisheries in Poverty Reduction and Food Security) held in Rome in July 2004 recommended the development of a new Article on 'Small-scale Fisheries and Poverty Alleviation'. Such an Article should include the following elements:

- Responsible fisheries that address the Millennium Development Goals
- Integration of fisheries into national development and poverty reduction strategies
- Strengthening the rights of small-scale fishers
- Empowerment through communication, capacity building and organization
- Fisheries and related policy favouring the poor
- Legislation in support of the poor
- Appropriate financing for poverty reduction



- Pro-poor fisheries management approaches
- Reducing vulnerability through better coping mechanisms and social safety nets
- Making markets work for the poor.

**Suggested action by the Committee**

35. The Committee is invited to review the paper and provide guidance to Member Nations, FAO and other agencies and international organizations as to strategies that might be promoted to ensure an enabling environment for small-scale fisheries. Agencies and international organizations may wish to indicate specific areas where they might be involved. The Committee may also wish to recommend amending the Code of Conduct to include an article on small-scale fisheries.

This working document (COFI/2005/5) was made available at the 26th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), Rome, Italy, 7-11 March 2005