

Securing Small-scale Fisheries

A recent meeting of the Committee on Fisheries of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations focused on sustainable small-scale fisheries

The Agenda Item of the 28th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), on securing sustainable small-scale fisheries (SSF), dealt mainly with discussing follow-up to the Global Conference on Securing Small-scale Fisheries, held in Bangkok from 13 to 17 October 2008 (see “The Right Form of Rights”, *SAMUDRA Report* No. 51, November 2008),

That landmark conference was attended by 280 participants from 65 countries, including representatives of small-scale, artisanal fisherpeople, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governments, inter-governmental organizations and academics. COFI was invited to offer guidance on necessary action, at national and international

(see page 10) demanded an additional Chapter to the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) on sustainable development of SSF, to create conditions whereby men and women, and indigenous communities, could enjoy their economic, social and cultural rights, as well as their civil and political rights. The proposed Chapter, the Statement said, should form an integral part of CCRF, and should be developed in consultation with small-scale fishing communities.

Thailand was the first Member to speak on the Agenda Item. SSF was significant for ensuring the well-being of the ecosystem, and the livelihoods and food security of coastal communities, Thailand said, and proposed an International Plan of Action (IPOA) for responsible SSF as well as a standing programme for SSF.

India, noting the critical importance of SSF, drew attention to the vulnerable conditions of small-scale fishers, and their poor access to basic human services. India’s human development indices showed that small-scale fishers fall below the national average in terms of development, COFI was informed. India proposed a dedicated global programme on SSF, along with the creation of a separate sub-committee on SSF.

Mauritania considered SSF as vital for development, and proposed setting up a sub-committee on SSF as well as adding a new Article to the CCRF, dedicated to SSF.

Food security

Indonesia said 80 per cent of its national fleet comprises small-scale fishing vessels, and underscored the

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levels, to secure sustainable SSF and to enhance their contribution towards attaining the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Before giving an opportunity to the Members of COFI to address the meeting, Zbigniew Karnicki, COFI Chairperson, gave permission to Naseegh Jaffer, Co-ordinator of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), to make a statement on behalf of WFFP, the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC). The Statement

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importance of SSF in providing food security and alleviating poverty. It supported an IPOA on SSF as well as the establishment of a sub-committee to empower SSF.

Malawi, among other things, drew attention to the issue of arrest and detention of small-scale fishers even in enclosed waters—for instance, in Lake Malawi, by Mozambique and Malawi. While supporting the proposal for establishing a new sub-committee on SSF, Malawi was against opening up the CCRF for a new Article on SSF on the ground that the CCRF, even as it is, was difficult to implement.

Chile drew attention to the SSF in its waters, which ranged from subsistence to export-oriented fisheries. Thirty per cent of its national fish production and the entire shellfish and algae production originate from SSF. Chile highlighted the importance of supporting capacity-building of SSF to improve the food safety standards and hygiene of fish products and to improve commercial prospects, including through market diversification. Chile further highlighted the need for providing social protection to the SSF sector, and shared with Members its social protection measures, such as a pension system and free medical aid for small-scale fishers. Chile also spoke about recognizing the role of women in small-scale fishing communities.

Sudan said fishers in the Red Sea are not well organized, and pointed to the challenges in protecting fisheries resources and employment in the Red Sea region. Sudan highlighted the importance of undertaking responsible management of fisheries resources in the region, also to ensure decent livelihoods for fishers. It spoke in support of implementing the CCRF in the region, and further voiced support for a global programme on SSF.

Egypt spoke in support of a regional body or arrangement for the Red Sea area. Arrest and detention of fishers was an issue of concern to Egypt.

Saudi Arabia said a large proportion of its fishers (40 per cent) and fishing vessels is in the small-scale sector. Small-scale fishers receive better prices for their products due to their superior quality. Saudi Arabia has been creating

protected areas to ensure livelihood options for the country's small-scale fishers, and to conserve coral reefs. Initiatives are also underway to create co-operatives for fishers. .

El Salvador highlighted the importance of developing fishers' associations to strengthen responsible fisheries, and responded to the need for a three-tier approach to the implementation of responsible fisheries, namely, at the global, regional and national levels, particularly through regional co-operation, at the Central American level, and through leaders of fishing communities, at the local level. El Salvador sought a specific programme for extending support to the small-scale sector, as well as a sub-committee on SSF.

Mozambique said SSF, marine and inland, is vital for rural development, particularly for providing employment. There are nearly one million people dependent on SSF in some way or other, of whom 400,000 are fishers. Mozambique supported developing a special Chapter in the CCRF, along with establishing a sub-committee and a special programme on SSF.

The European Commission (EC) said combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fisheries was necessary to protect the livelihoods of small-scale fishing communities. Its regulations to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fisheries would protect small-scale fishing communities in developing countries from loss of revenues and livelihoods, and would

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Opening session of the 28th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

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not deny them export opportunities to the EC. The EU's commitment to achieving the MDGs was reiterated, as was the need for more attention to the potential of small-scale fisheries. The EC said it would not support a new Article in the CCRF on SSF, and advocated effective implementation of all the existing Articles as well as further development, through an inclusive process, of the technical guidelines on SSF's contribution to food security and poverty alleviation.

Considering the important contribution of SSF to world fish production and consumption, South Africa advocated a dedicated and comprehensive instrument for SSF, and supported adding a special Chapter on SSF to the CCRF.

China said the small-scale sector contributes significantly to its coastal

and inland fisheries as well as to its aquaculture, and guarantees food security, social security and human development. SSF, however, are vulnerable to climate change and natural calamities. The rights of small-scale fishers are sometimes not protected, and they are often forced out of their fishing grounds by pollution. The Chinese fisheries policies and measures for SSF include: imparting technical training to fishers, including for acquisition of skills to change jobs; popularization of relevant science and technology; promotion of ecologically sound management of aquaculture; and provision of equipment for safety of fishing vessels and crew, and for avoidance of collision of vessels at sea. China highlighted the importance of streamlining SSF to reduce fishing intensity, and proposed that FAO, within the scope of its mandate, should develop a global IPOA for SSF.

Cote d'Ivoire and Morocco said they are in support of developing an IPOA on SSF. Mauritius said it supported a dedicated global programme on

SSF under FAO. Chad and Costa Rica supported creating a special programme on SSF. Although Ecuador said it was not too happy with a proliferation of sub-committees, it supported a COFI sub-committee on SSF. Ecuador further supported a special Chapter in the CCRF on SSF. Senegal supported the establishment of a COFI sub-committee on SSF as well as setting up a specific programme dedicated to SSF.

Uganda was in favour of enhancing the role of SSF in national development. It sought a clear definition of SSF and adoption of co-management regimes to promote the direct involvement of fishers in fisheries management. It supported a special Chapter on SSF in the CCRF.

The Republic of Korea (ROK) said it has a significant number of small-scale fishers. It questioned the desirability and benefits of ecolabelling and certification schemes to SSF, especially if there are high certification costs, and wanted to ensure that such schemes do not constitute any invisible trade barrier for SSF. Considering the harsh working conditions in SSF, Korea viewed in favourable light the introduction of human rights into the fisheries agenda. It demanded a special Chapter in the CCRF on SSF.

New Zealand said small-scale fishers in the country are economically rich since they caught valuable species such as abalone and rock lobster, and held that definition and application of some of the issues related to SSF, especially poverty alleviation, do not extend to their SSF. New Zealand highlighted the importance of coherence in capacity management in SSF and recognized, in this context, the role of a rights-based approach to SSF. New Zealand supported developing a special Chapter in the CCRF, with particular attention to SSF in developing countries.

Pole-and-line fishing

Maldives said SSF are relatively more environment-friendly and bring greater benefits to coastal communities. Artisanal fisheries are the mainstay of tuna fisheries in the Maldives, and are enshrined in the country's culture and tradition, as embodied in the pole-and-line fishing technique. This technique

should even be granted a geographical indication (GI) status, it was observed. Artisanal and commercial fisheries, Maldives said, often target the same fish stocks, and, in many parts of the world, SSF are threatened by commercial fishing operations. If fish landings are not differentiated, then SSF are at risk. Industrialized countries should, therefore, pay a higher price for environment-friendly SSF products from developing countries, it was argued. Maldives supported a COFI sub-committee on fisheries as well as a special Chapter in the CCRF on SSF.

Kiribati supported developing a management and development framework to enhance SSF to contribute to sustainable fisheries in the South Pacific. It bemoaned the loss of lives and fishing assets, especially of vessels below 10 m in length. Search-and-rescue operations for smaller vessels have proved to be prohibitively expensive, taking away resources that could have gone towards equipping SSF vessels for greater safety, and compromising the country's capacity to deter IUU fishing in its exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Kiribati proposed developing a framework or strategy to provide affordable sea safety equipment to SSF.

Afghanistan said a global programme dedicated to SSF, an IPOA or international guidelines for SSF are complementary, and was of the view that an IPOA on SSF can be developed, which could later lead to international guidelines for SSF. Whether or not to set up a COFI sub-committee for SSF, Afghanistan said, should be viewed in the light of FAO not having a sub-committee dedicated to small farmers.

Angola spoke on how SSF contributed significantly to employment and food security, and how they occupied the pride of place in Angolan fisheries. Women dominate fish processing and also head some fisheries co-operatives, it was observed. Angola supported a sub-committee on SSF, an IPOA, adding a special Chapter to the CCRF on SSF, and a special programme for SSF that also focuses on bolstering sea safety on board small-scale fishing vessels.

Norway was reluctant to open up the CCRF to add a special Chapter on

SSF; rather, it would support an IPOA to cover all aspects of SSF. A special Chapter, Norway argued, would not be in a position to negotiate all aspects of SSF in a concrete manner. Norway also disagreed with the proposal for a COFI sub-committee on SSF on the ground that issues discussed at a sub-committee would again be discussed at COFI. Following the civil society organizations' preparatory process for the Bangkok Conference on SSF (see "The Right Form of Rights", *SAMUDRA Report* No. 51, November 2008), Norway said it would support three regional expert consultations on SSF, followed by an international technical consultation to develop an IPOA. Norway would participate in these meetings and was willing to co-finance them. Norway also announced its decision to organize an international conference on indigenous peoples and SSF.

The United States (US) recognized the importance of increasing the contribution of SSF to sustainable development, and the need to build greater capacity towards better fisheries management through community-based and co-management regimes, and through reduced post-harvest losses. The US would not support a sub-committee on SSF at this juncture, nor would it support an IPOA on SSF, it was observed. The US proposed crafting a new Chapter in the CCRF on SSF by building on its existing provisions,

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A scene from the Side Event on Agenda Item 9: Securing sustainable fisheries: Towards responsible fisheries and social development

Side Event

Focusing on Human Rights

A Side Event, titled "Human Rights of Small-scale Fishing Communities: What Should FAO's Commitment Be?" was organized by the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and the International NGO/CSO Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) on 4 March 2009, during the 28th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Moderated by Naseegh Jaffer, Co-ordinator, WFFP, the well-attended event featured a total of six presentations.

Arthur Bull and Herman Kumara of WFFP presented the Bangkok Statement on Small-scale Fisheries, which highlighted the key concerns and

In his talk on "Moving Beyond Commitments to Implementation of a Human-rights Approach in Fisheries", Thomas Kocherry of WFFP urged the international community to move beyond rhetoric on human rights and to honour their commitments. Organizations of small-scale fisherpeoples have a central role in undertaking campaigns and struggles for the implementation of human rights commitments by governments, he said.

On the subject of "The Right to Food Guidelines: Recommendations for Fisheries", Barbara Ekwall of FAO's Right to Food Unit stressed the obligation of States to ensure food security. A human rights-based approach, she said, is particularly pertinent in relation to access

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Thomas Kocherry, Chandrika Sharma, Barbara Ekwall, Naseegh Jaffer, Arthur Bull and Herman Kumara during the Side Event organized by WFFP, ICSF and IPC on 9 March 2009

interests of small-scale fishing communities. They pointed out that the Statement itself was the outcome of a much larger consultative process, which included three regional workshops.

Chandrika Sharma, ICSF, speaking on "Recognizing Human Rights of Small-scale Fishing Communities: Is There a Need for a Negotiated Instrument at the FAO?", underscored the rationale and imperative for a negotiated instrument on small-scale fisheries, in particular for a separate Chapter on small-scale fisheries in the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF).

This was supported by Natalia Laiño Lojo of WFFP. Drawing attention to her organization, AGAMAR, which works with women shellfish collectors, she pointed out that, despite the important role of women in fisheries, the aspect of gender was completely missing from the CCRF.

to resources, stakeholder participation, and a focus on the most vulnerable sections of society.

The last presentation at the Side Event, by Federica Donati of the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), Geneva, was on "Mainstreaming Human Rights and the Human Rights-based Approach (HRBA)".

She stressed that the process adopted for implementing the HRBA is as vital as the outcome, and it is important to keep in mind the principles of participation, equality, non-discrimination and accountability. States have the obligation to respect, protect and fulfill human rights, which need to be reflected in constitutional and legislative frameworks and effective and accessible institutions like parliaments and the judiciary.

but without disturbing the existing Articles.

Brazil said respect of human rights of fishers is important, and said viewing the right to food as a human right is a move in the right direction. Brazil considered marine protected areas (MPAs) as a tool for fisheries sustainability. Brazil was concerned that fishing communities can be negatively affected by unilateral trade measures. Brazil asked FAO to seek legal opinion on creating a separate Chapter on SSF in the CCRF without affecting its existing content.

Canada said SSF defy a universal definition. SSF in Canada, for example, included aboriginal food and subsistence fisheries as well as high-value fisheries. Canada said adoption of a rights-based approach to fisheries would be good for fisheries governance. While it supported a special programme to adopt modern management tools in SSF, it was against creating a special Chapter in the CCRF and developing an IPOA on SSF.

Cambodia said more than 80 per cent of the animal protein intake of the Cambodian population came from fisheries, and pointed out that for Cambodians, fish was like butter and cheese for Europeans. It referred to the conference on a rights-based approach to SSF co-hosted with ICSF in Siem Reap in 2007 (see “Asserting Right, Defining Responsibilities”, *SAMUDRA Report* No. 47, July 2007). Cambodia supported the creation of a sub-committee on SSF and developing international guidelines on SSF, or even compiling best practices in SSF.

Specific recommendations


Forty Members took the floor to speak on the Agenda Item. The majority of them proposed specific recommendations related to: (i) creating a specific global programme on SSF; (ii) creating a special Chapter in the CCRF on SSF; (iii) developing an IPOA on SSF; and/or (iv) establishing a COFI sub-committee on SSF. While some Members made more than one recommendation to secure SSF at the global level, a few Members supported a standalone IPOA; a few others supported a new Article on

SSF in the CCRF; and several Members suggested establishing a specific global programme dedicated to SSF.

On the whole, 12 Members were in support of a new Article in the Code, followed by 11 Members in support of establishing a COFI sub-committee on SSF, and eight in support of an IPOA for SSF. However, there was no consensus. Ten Members were in support of a specific global programme on SSF. Ultimately, COFI directed the FAO Secretariat to examine various options to carry all these suggestions forward, as well as to create a framework for monitoring and reporting on efforts to secure sustainable SSF.

Most of the COFI Members who participated actively in the discussion on the Agenda Item were from Asia

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and Africa. While several Members spoke in generalities, a few saw sustainable and safe SSF as a regional or national issue. The industrialized country Members of COFI who spelt out different options—with the exception of Norway—appeared keen to confine them to securing SSF in developing countries, thus narrowing the scope of SSF mainly to developing countries. 

For more



www.fao.org/fishery/nems/38478/en
Committee on Fisheries (COFI)

www.fao.org/fishery/about/cofi/reports
COFI Reports

rights.icsf.net
ICSF Rights subsite

sites.google.com/site/smallscalefisheries/
Small-scale fisheries at COFI