

# An Important First Step

**A new training course from the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) Project will help build capacity in the ecosystem approach to fisheries management in Asia Pacific**

Often remote, and usually vulnerable, many small-scale fishing communities find existence literally 'life on the edge'. Rarely involved in the management of the resources they depend upon (if indeed there is any actual management), many artisanal fishers find themselves chasing dwindling stocks and eyeing the future with the worried concern usually reserved for gathering storm clouds.

Effectively integrating resource users such as small-scale fishers into fisheries management has long been a challenge. One way of giving small-scale fishers a bigger stake in the

benefit of resources, communities and governments alike.

Backed by a number of major international forums, the ecosystem approach is recognized as a guiding principle for the recently endorsed Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, promoted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). These landmark guidelines help safeguard the sustainable use of fishery resources that millions of small-scale fishers around the world, particularly in developing countries, depend upon for their livelihoods.

It may sound good in theory, but putting EAFM into practice is far more challenging, as Chris O'Brien, BOBLME Regional Co-ordinator, explains: "When the BOBLME Project started out, there was a real need to help develop more efficient fisheries management for the Bay of Bengal.

Many countries and organizations in the region recognize that the ecosystem approach offers the most practical and effective way to manage complex fisheries. However, fisheries staff lack EAFM experience and capacity. People know the buzzwords but putting them into practice is a problem. As a result, progress in developing ecosystem-based management plans has been slow."

## Ecosystem strategies

"Decentralization policies have also left local fisheries agencies with the challenging task of developing management plans that not only work locally, but also fit into broader fishery and ecosystem strategies. This situation needs to be

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management of the resources they rely upon is through the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM).

An innovative and participatory tool, EAFM promotes systems and decision-making processes that balance environmental, human and social well-being, within improved governance frameworks.

By involving all relevant stakeholders in a participatory process, management plans better capture the diverse array of elements that make up and impact any fishery. Stakeholder involvement in the planning process (with small-scale fishers playing an important role) helps lead to more effective implementation of plans, to the

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addressed as a matter of priority,” he added.

To help address these urgent capacity-development needs, a comprehensive training course entitled ‘*Essential EAFM*’, has been developed and launched by the BOBLME Project in collaboration with partners, including the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Asia Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC).

The *Essential EAFM* training course is designed to help meet the need for capacity development in the ecosystem approach, especially with regards to complex, data-poor fisheries with weak or no management which are common in the Asia-Pacific region.

The five-day course begins with explanations of why a new approach is required to address the many threats and issues facing capture fisheries. Participants then develop professional planning skills for more effective decisionmaking. By working through the entire planning process, participants are equipped with an array of tools to develop fisheries-management plans that address current demands for food security and livelihoods while protecting marine resources for the future. A practical ‘hands-on’ approach is used to show how EAFM plans can be developed under the constraints common to the region.

“A major strength of the course is that it allows participants to develop an EAFM plan that can be taken away and, with some further work, be implemented either in the participant’s country or as a transboundary plan,” says O’Brien.

In recognition that many of the challenges and issues threatening sustainable fishing fall outside the mandate of fisheries management agencies, *Essential EAFM* not only targets mid-level fisheries and coastal resource managers but also environmental, economic development and planning staff.

During early pilot sessions for the course, the value of broader, cross-sectoral collaboration was evident. Participants from different agencies and countries actively shared

experiences and expertise during the development of draft EAFM plans.

The course is also designed in a way which should make local adaptation in Asia-Pacific countries easy. “By changing the focus and examples, the *Essential EAFM* course can be easily modified to apply to other marine and inland fisheries and even aquaculture. The principles and the approach to management planning are the same,” adds O’Brien.

Building the capacity of ‘change agents’ such as mid-level fisheries or planning staff to effectively implement the ecosystem approach should benefit small-scale fisheries as well as the multitude of family members, traders, processors and consumers who depend on them.

Although *Essential EAFM* does not specifically target small-scale fisheries, its integrated and holistic approach will lead to such communities playing a more active role in developing and implementing fisheries-management plans which are both effective and inclusive.

The development of ‘people skills’ features highly in *Essential EAFM*, skills that are so often lacking in conventional fisheries management, usually to the detriment of small-scale fisher communities.

“There is a real need to consult and involve people,” says BOBLME’s chief technical adviser Rudolf

BOBLME



A training session in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia. The *Essential EAFM* course is designed to help meet the need for capacity development in the ecosystem approach

Hermes. “It is the people skills that make a difference and if stakeholder engagement is done properly, then small-scale fishers will not be overlooked. The *Essential* EAFM training will broaden participants’ views. They will learn participatory methods and that it is no good to simply be top-down any more.”

During *Essential* EAFM training, participants learn to carry out participatory planning processes. They gain hands-on experience of how to identify and engage stakeholders as well as how to work with them so that they are fully involved in the development of fisheries-management plans. The process helps ensure that small-scale fishing communities are given a voice, and that their voice is heard.

Important techniques such as conflict management are introduced and practised. These will help fisheries officers to better understand and reduce disputes between various resource users, including small-scale fishers.

The training should also lead to utilization of improved fisheries-management measures such as zoning that provide rights and protection (but also responsibilities) to small-

scale fishers as well as include them in joint enforcement /compliance teams alongside fisheries officials.

First trialled in July 2013, *Essential* EAFM has quickly gathered momentum with sessions held in Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines. Early events have been used to fine-tune the material and delivery as well as to begin the process of building up a body of trainers who can help run or support the course when it is held in new locations.

“We want to train as many practitioners as possible,” says O’Brien. “In addition to working with government staff who need these skills now, *Essential* EAFM should also be taught in universities and become a part of undergraduate courses so when officers rise through the ranks they understand it and are more inclined to use it.”

“We are furthermore seeking to create a lively trainers’ and trainees’ network as well as an active community of practice. By doing so, we should be able to create demand for an ecosystem approach from people within government agencies who really understand it,” he adds.

The Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre (SEAFDEC), based

## *Essential* EAFM training materials available free of charge

A complete set of *Essential* EAFM course materials is available for use free of charge and can be downloaded from [www.boblme.org/eafm](http://www.boblme.org/eafm). Materials include complete learning modules, presentations, and tools to be used at different stages in the EAFM process, a resource guide, a handbook, session plans and workbooks. Interested organizations are encouraged to make use of the materials and to contact the BOBLME Project should they need further information or assistance.

### **Who supported *Essential* EAFM?**

*Essential* EAFM was jointly developed by specialists in fisheries, conservation, resource management and education and training from the BOBLME Project, the US Coral Triangle Support Partnership, NOAA’s Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Centre, APFIC and IMA International.

Financial support has been provided by the Global Environment Facility (GEF); the Norwegian Agency for International Development (NORAD); the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA); FAO (through the BOBLME Project); NOAA and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the US Coral Triangle Initiative (USCTI) and the Coral Triangle Support Program (CTSP).

### **For more information**

[www.boblme.org/eafm](http://www.boblme.org/eafm) or contact [rcu@boblme.org](mailto:rcu@boblme.org)

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A fisherman in Kampong Phluk village, on the Tonle Sap lake in Cambodia where a community fisheries management system is in place

in Bangkok, will become a regional hub for the *Essential* EAFM course. A regional co-ordinator is also set to be appointed to help get *Essential* EAFM up and running and to provide support for institutions around the region wishing to run the course.

Efforts to build sufficient capacity in the Asia-Pacific region to implement

the ecosystem approach will take many, many years. Yet, as the proverb goes, “Every journey starts with a first step”. The launch of *Essential* EAFM and its open availability to any organization which wishes to use it should help sow the seeds for better fisheries management, to the benefit of fishers and resources alike. **3**

**For more**



[www.boblme.org](http://www.boblme.org)

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