

Action Stations

Sri Lanka's National Fisheries Policy needs to be remodelled to incorporate the SSF Guidelines in order to attain the goal of securing sustainable small-scale fisheries

The Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development (MFARD) of Sri Lanka recently prepared a White Paper on National Fisheries Policy in 2018, which was approved by the Cabinet and is expected to be presented to the parliament. It fails to address a number of compelling needs of the small-scale fisheries sector. The Sri Lanka Forum for Small-Scale Fisheries (SLFSSF) responded to this need; it embarked on a process to implement the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines) between July 2018 and May 2019, with assistance from the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), as part of efforts of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) towards global implementation of the SSF Guidelines. Following the FAO Project Results Matrix, the SLFSSF took up a number of activities.

Plan of activities and methodology

The plan of activities included: sensitizing the state actors from diverse institutions in the coastal zone on the SSF Guidelines; development of communication tools for community stakeholders, as part of which the SSF Guidelines were translated and posters and factsheets prepared; stakeholder consultation workshops covering several parts of the country; assessment of the current fisheries policy; and re-modelling the policy by incorporating the relevant sections of the SSF Guidelines. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools were used to extract information at stakeholder consultations and the results were analysed using non-parametric statistical tools.

The outcome: Missing links and new SSF policy

Stakeholder consultation workshops discussed diverse issues. The results of these discussions were analysed and their policy implications based on the relevant SSF Guidelines were noted. After re-visiting the current National Fisheries Policy by a group of policy experts and identifying the missing links, a new SSF policy paper was finally prepared.

Tenure rights

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) at stakeholder consultation workshops revealed a number of incidences where

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the rights of fishers were violated, such as the acquisition of beach areas for tourism, leading to loss of anchorage sites, beach-seining sites, space available for craft and gear repair and fish processing. It also came up that large-scale mechanized craft and gear have taken away resources which were traditionally available to the small-scale and artisanal fishers. There were also concerns about rights that fishers want to possess and enjoy, including access to and use of mangrove forests and land adjoining beaches. In addressing these issues, the need for zonation of the coastal area was suggested.

Sustainable resource management

The absence of a proper monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS)

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mechanism to monitor coastal resource management was highlighted. The need to decentralize management decisions to the district level with the involvement of local government actors was also underlined. Attention was also focused on treating the coastal zone as one ecosystem and to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are involved in the process of management and decision making at all levels, including youth, women, the differently abled and other marginalized groups. It was agreed that management approaches will have to be holistic, integrated, inclusive, and participatory.

Value chains, post-harvest handling and trade

Post-harvest losses reaching a high level of 40 per cent was noted. One important missing link was the absence of provisions for spatial planning to allow for allocation of space for various fisheries-related activities on the coast; craft anchorage, equipment storage and fish drying, and shore facilities to engage in such activities. The need to introduce scientific fish handling was also emphasized. The importance of government intervention and promotion of the entry of community organizations into fish marketing to break middlemen oligopsonies was highlighted. It was suggested to regulate foreign trade to ensure that the nutrition and food security of the people is not threatened by international trade in fish and fish products.

Occupational health and safety

The lack of concern for safety at sea among fishers was noted. It was agreed that there is a need to build awareness among fishers on the importance of adopting sea-safety measures. Providing fishers with economic access to safety equipment was suggested as an important policy strategy. Apart from on-board safety equipment, concerns were expressed on the need to make landing sites and equipment safe for navigation. Ratification of the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions on safety and work in the fishing sector was also proposed.

Social protection and fisheries insurance

Participants expressed displeasure at the functioning of the Fishermen's Pension Scheme. Fisheries insurance, too, has always been a failure due to information asymmetries between insurers and insurees, leading to non-payment or delays in paying indemnities. It was proposed that a fisheries insurance scheme be operated through the fisher community to reduce these asymmetries. Another related problem was ill-health and injuries caused by bad weather and climate-related hazards. Hence the need to promote fisheries insurance schemes that cover both fishing and climate-related risks was underlined.

Disaster risk and climate change

Despite the fact that Sri Lanka possesses a fairly good weather information system, the participants thought that an 'early-warning' mechanism is still lacking. The possibility of using mobile phones to communicate weather data to fishers was also discussed. In improving ex-ante management of disasters, it was proposed to maintain a registry of fishers, craft and fishing equipment with regular update of information. Moreover, involvement of community organizations and the need for cross-sectoral collaboration and institutional co-ordination to deal with disasters and climate change impacts in the coastal zone were also emphasized.

Gender equality

Discussions revealed that in predominantly Buddhist coastal communities, a woman's employment was still considered a reflection of the man's inability to feed the family. It was proposed that awareness be raised in these communities to show the importance of women's employment in improving family well-being. Moreover, employment is a right of women. The important role played by women in fisheries cooperative societies was also noted and a minimum of 25 per cent representation of women in the committees of cooperatives was recommended. It was proposed that the government should take steps to remove gender-based discrepancies in wage rates.

Social development

It was agreed that no measures taken towards sustainable resource management would succeed if measures towards social development were not adopted at the same time. Several measures were proposed to guarantee people's access to basic social services: Affordable access to basic education, health, housing and household amenities; according priority to children of fisher communities to fisheries higher education; provision of financial assistance for children of fisher families to continue education during the off-season; development of credit and micro-credit schemes to encourage investment in fisheries; and to enable the poor and vulnerable to access credit.

Capacity development

It was proposed to make fishing communities aware of new fishing techniques and be trained in them, especially in deep-sea fishing technology, post-harvest processing and alternative income-generation activities. While there is so much interest today in sustainable use of resources, conservation and management, it was disclosed that fishing communities are hardly made aware of the diverse measures needed to be adopted to achieve the goals of sustainability. Thus, it was proposed to build capacities of members of fishing communities in new fishing techniques, deep-sea fishing technology, post-harvest processing, alternative livelihoods, resource conservation and co-management. The need to provide training to women and school dropouts in post-harvest processing and other ancillary activities was also recognized.

Empowering community organizations

As a means of building capacities of fishing communities in undertaking management functions, it was proposed to provide training facilities to officials of fisheries co-operatives in resource conservation and management, financial management and principles of cooperation. Statements concerning the dissemination of policy documents, laws, rules and regulations in a manner fisheries communities understand

easily, and the need to consult fisheries co-operatives in the design, planning and implementation of fisheries and other development projects were also proposed to be incorporated into the National Fisheries Policy.

The way forward

The process of the SSF Guidelines implementation led to the formulation of a SSF policy paper, which included a number of policy strategies that were absent in the National Fisheries Policy, 2018. All consultations and policy workshops were carried out with the participation of State actors, academics, researchers, civil society and community organizations. The Secretary of the Ministry of Fisheries attended the final policy workshop as the keynote speaker.

It is now necessary to get the government approval for the revised policy document, incorporating the new policy paper. As it became evident from country-wide consultations, the full benefits of the policy process can only be reaped if

(i) the management process is made participatory, inclusive, integrated and holistic;

(ii) co-management platforms are established at the local level, rising up to the national level;

(iii) capacities of State actors and communities are built to participate effectively in management decision making;

(iv) community organizations are empowered and their active involvement in development and management decision making is ensured; and

(v) actions are taken to invest in social development, including gender equity, working conditions, social protection and insurance. These actions will ensure that the revised fisheries policy meets the goal of securing sustainable small-scale fisheries. 

For more



<https://www.icsf.net/en/samudra/article/EN/79-4352-Wellbeing-Aspir.html>

Wellbeing Aspirations

<https://www.icsf.net/en/samudra/article/EN/80-4368-Aiming-for-Holi.html>

Aiming for Holistic Management

<https://igssf.icsf.net/en/page/1088-Sri%20Lanka.html>

Implementing the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication in Sri Lanka, SLFSSF and ICSF