

Small-scale Fisheries Upfront

The recent meet of the Committee on Fisheries of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations had a special focus on small-scale fisheries

Small-scale fisheries was pretty much part of the flavour of the 29th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI 29) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Indicative of this was the fact that States, while reporting on the progress made in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries

Bangkok, Thailand, titled “Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries: Bringing Together Responsible Fisheries and Social Development”. To seek greater support for, and debate on the content and scope of, such an instrument, WFFP, WFF, ICSF and IPC organized a lively side event during lunchtime on 3 February (see box), prior to the discussion on Agenda Item 10 on small-scale fisheries.

In the end, civil society efforts met with qualified success. During discussions on Agenda Item 10, COFI agreed that, in view of the important role played by small-scale fisheries, FAO should continue to give priority to the subsector and ensure adequate visibility for it, particularly in relevant international forums that deal directly or indirectly with these fisheries. COFI also approved the development of a new international instrument on small-scale fisheries to complement the CCRF, drawing on relevant existing instruments.

Countries' support

The proposal to develop a new instrument was supported by over 20 countries, including Brazil, Norway, Thailand, South Africa, Morocco, Namibia, Russia, Chile, Mauritania, Indonesia, Oman, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Mexico, the United States (US), Angola, Algeria, Mauritius, Cameroon and Ivory Coast. Two members—Bangladesh and Maldives—expressed reservations about such an instrument. There was also support from some members for the setting up of a subcommittee on small-scale fisheries. Several developing countries also stressed the

(CCRF) and related instruments, had ranked addressing the interests of small-scale fisheries in marine and inland fisheries management plans quite high on their priority list. From being ranked fifth in 2005, and fourth in 2007 and 2009, it was ranked second. Regional fisheries bodies also reported on accommodating the interests of small-scale fishers.

A sizeable delegation of about 25 persons representing small-scale fishworker and support organizations, including the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF), the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and the International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty (IPC), were present at COFI. At stake for them was the adoption of an international instrument on small-scale fisheries by COFI, a demand that has been pending since the 2008 FAO conference on small-scale fisheries in

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need for increased funding to support small-scale fisheries-related assistance programmes.

There were specific issues raised in the interventions made by States on the options before COFI for supporting small-scale fisheries.

Norway said it would support international guidelines on small-scale fisheries to address the rights and interests of fishers, including of women, as well as an international support programme. The instrument, Norway suggested, could take account of the “Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security” adopted by the FAO in 2004 as well as the “Voluntary Guidelines on responsible governance of land and natural resources tenure”, now being developed by the FAO.

Russia welcomed an instrument on small-scale fisheries, especially a set of guidelines that are recommendatory and voluntary in nature. These guidelines could focus on social and cultural rights and economic development, and be based on human-rights principles, including those related to the human rights of indigenous peoples. The guidelines could develop the concept of small-scale fisheries and criteria for defining it, as well as offer protection to the access rights of indigenous people. They could also include sport fishing and coastal fishing, and focus on issues such as labour protection, safety at sea and gear-related issues, said Russia.

Brazil said it fully endorses a global assistance programme for small-scale fisheries, with full consideration to food security, poverty alleviation and gender. It stressed the importance of taking the question of gender into consideration in all initiatives related to the promotion of the sustainable development of small-scale fisheries. Given the importance of small-scale fisheries, including from an environmental sustainability perspective, and the higher levels of vulnerability their communities are exposed to, it expressed support to the development of an international

instrument. Brazil noted that this should take the form of an International Plan of Action (IPOA) as this carried greater political weight, but that it was open to exploring any other avenues that COFI might deem appropriate.

South Africa also supported the development of a negotiated international instrument to guide and manage small-scale fisheries, to complement the CCRF. Such an instrument could provide COFI, and, therefore, the United Nations with a better tool to protect the socioeconomic rights of small-scale fishers, contributing to the eradication of poverty, and helping to work towards the sustainable use of natural resources. South Africa further suggested that such an instrument be developed with the participation of affected parties.

Thailand, supporting an international instrument, suggested that microcredit and vessel insurance schemes should be considered under the global assistance programme for small-scale fisheries.

Chile highlighted the importance of improving governance and transparency, and of adopting an ecosystem approach to fisheries. It extended support to an international instrument on small-scale fisheries, underlining that the diversity within small-scale fisheries should not be used as an excuse to do nothing.

IISD/EARTH NEGOTIATIONS BULLETIN



The 29th session of COFI approved the development of a new international instrument on small-scale fisheries to complement the CCRF

Small meet, large attendance

The Side Event organized jointly by WFF, WFFP, ICSF and IPC titled "What COFI Should Do: Agenda Item 10 on Small-scale Fisheries", was well attended, to say the least. A panel comprising WFFP, WFF and ICSF presented civil society perspectives on the action that COFI needs to take to secure small-scale fisheries. They made a strong case for an international instrument with a rights-based approach, which incorporates economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights, and which has a specific focus on women. The panel also included Rolf Willmann of the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, who presented the proposal prepared by the FAO for a Global Assistance Programme for Small-scale Fisheries, for comments and feedback.

The discussion was opened for debate soon after. Taking part in the discussion were several national delegations, including from India, Mauritania, Japan, the EU, Brazil, Norway, Spain, the US and Chile. Present too were representatives from the African Union, the World Bank and several multilateral and intergovernmental organizations, and fishworkers' and fishing industry representatives.

Among most of the developing countries that attended, there was consensus that a global programme of work guided by an international instrument geared towards poverty alleviation and food security would be a boon for small-scale fisheries development in their countries.

Chile noted that the sector was highly diverse and complex, and that such an initiative would require defining small-scale fisheries more clearly.

The US voiced concerns about basing fisheries policies and instruments on the basis of size alone; "size is a complicated criteria", it was noted.

Some delegations questioned the need for a new instrument. The EU made a particularly strong intervention, stating that a focus was needed at the national and regional levels to implement instruments that are already available, and that national policies were needed to improve the livelihoods of coastal populations. This viewpoint was countered by those who felt that, despite the number of existing instruments, small-scale fisheries were not getting the attention they deserved. Many of these instruments, notably the CCRF, do not pay specific attention to small-scale fisheries, it was pointed out. There are many new challenges being faced to confront which a new international instrument is needed, it was argued.

Two impassioned interventions were made by representatives of fishers from France and Spain. The French accused the European Commission of adopting a position that was both backward and incoherent, while the Spanish stressed that this space at the FAO should not just focus on poverty and hunger, and that small-scale fisheries all over the world share many problems and a common vision—and there is an urgent need for small-scale fishers to organize themselves.

The discussions at the side event were a precursor to the formal debate in COFI, serving to draw attention to the perspectives and aspirations of civil society and to take forward the debate on the demand for an international instrument.

Mexico, stressing the importance of participatory management, training, organization and alternative jobs, said that there is need to extend support for realizing the human rights of small-scale fishers. Indigenous people should have priority to fishery resources, it noted. It supported an international instrument, especially an IPOA, linked to a national plan for assisting small-scale fisheries.

India said that small-scale fisheries was the most important agenda item for COFI 29. It, however, expressed concern that no progress had been made in taking forward the suggestion made during COFI 28 on the setting up of a subcommittee as an exclusive platform for small-scale fisheries. On the international instrument, India cautioned that should COFI decide to develop it, the scope should be carefully developed so that it does not become a barrier to trade. India also noted that it did not want an overemphasis on human rights in any such instrument as such commitments already existed in the constitutions of most countries.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, supporting a subcommittee on small-scale fisheries, noted that addressing the problems of small-scale fisheries is not merely a technical exercise.

Maldives said that, keeping in mind its experience with a third-party ecolabelling certification, it is uneasy about an international instrument. Such an instrument might lead to costs of production going up. It, therefore, supported India's proposal to have a subcommittee on small-scale fisheries.

Bangladesh also favoured a subcommittee on small-scale fisheries.

New Zealand said a focus on human rights would considerably extend the mandate of COFI; the focus should be on fisheries issues, it stressed. Assistance to small-scale fisheries should be provided to generate wealth and remove people from poverty. For this, coherent partnerships, avoiding duplication of work between donors, are needed. New Zealand further pointed to the several instruments that already exist, which can be used to support small-scale fisheries. If anything at all, it favoured a chapter dedicated to small-scale fisheries in the CCRF.

Costa Rica also opined that human-rights issues were beyond the mandate of COFI. El Salvador, speaking on behalf of seven Central American countries, said it is important to support the human rights of those

involved in small-scale fisheries, as also mentioned in the declaration from the regional consultative workshops organized by FAO. It called for regional action plans on small-scale fisheries, as well as specific programmes, including for inland fisheries. It also drew attention to issues of indigenous peoples. The need for a regional approach, as through the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our Americas (ALBA), was reiterated by Venezuela.

The US wanted greater attention to be paid to small-scale fisheries, while ensuring greater clarity on what this constitutes. The mere size of fishing vessels as a criterion, for example, is not enough. The proposed instrument should focus on developing countries, it stressed, with due attention paid to social, economic, cultural and rights-based themes. Planning and management of risks and disasters, and plans to cope with climate change to reduce vulnerability of small-scale fisheries to such risks, is important. The US supported an IPOA or guidelines as a preferred way forward, rather than opening up the CCRF. The IPOA or guidelines can be an associated document to the CCRF, the US proposed.

The European Union (EU) said though small-scale fisheries is an important subsector requiring systematic attention, it was not convinced that a new international instrument is needed. Rather, effective implementation of existing instruments, such as the CCRF, is important. However, the EU said it will not block any emerging consensus to develop an international instrument on small-scale fisheries for developing countries.

Japan recognized the importance of small-scale fisheries in both developed and developing countries and the fact that they are often socially disadvantaged. Given the diverse realities facing the sector, it called for a case-by-case response to deal with issues facing the subsector. Small-scale fisheries, it further noted, also has negative impacts on fisheries resources. There is need for integrating small-scale fisheries

into international fisheries management systems to ensure policy coherence, and to promote bottom-up approaches like participatory co-management.

Canada stressed the importance of an ecosystem and a value-chain approach to fisheries, and of managing small-scale fisheries as part of an overall approach. It also pointed to the need for engaging all stakeholders in the management process.

The civil society statement, following the interventions by States, was read out by Zoila Bustamente, the President of the Chilean artisanal fishworker organization, CONAPACH, on behalf of WFFP, WFF, ICSF and IPC.

The statement noted that over 20 countries had supported an international instrument on small-scale fisheries to complement the CCRF. Such an instrument should guide regional and national plans of action. It should be global in scope and should recognize the social, economic, cultural, civil and political rights of small-scale, artisanal and indigenous fishing communities.

Such an instrument, as well as a global programme of assistance for small-scale fisheries, should be developed and implemented in consultation with civil society. This would go a long way in ensuring a better and more dignified future for small-scale fishing communities, the statement concluded.

There was concern, particularly among small-scale and artisanal fishworker and indigenous peoples' groups from Europe and Canada, that the focus would be mainly on developing countries, in keeping with the interventions by the EU and the US. Civil society groups agreed, however, to continue advocating for an instrument that is global in scope, focusing also on issues facing small-scale and artisanal fishing communities as well as indigenous fishing communities in countries of the North.

For more


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