

Guiding Small-scale Fisheries

A set of international voluntary guidelines is being planned to address both inland and marine small-scale fisheries in developing countries

The Twenty-ninth Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), held in Rome in early 2011, agreed on the important role played by the small-scale fisheries sector and decided to give it high priority and adequate visibility. The Committee approved the development of a new international instrument on small-scale fisheries. A set of international voluntary guidelines that would draw on relevant existing instruments complementing the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, to address both inland and marine small-scale fisheries in developing countries, will be developed. This is to be done with the involvement of all stakeholders. The FAO Council subsequently lent support to COFI by including the work on small-scale fisheries in the Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) for the year 2012-13.

The workshop-cum-symposium on sustainable small-scale fisheries, organized by the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF), India, in collaboration with ICSF, and held at Kolkata in September 2011 (see "A Bottom-up, Pro-fisher Policy", page 42), was intended to contribute to the process of developing the proposed FAO guidelines. Drawing participants from a range of fisheries—marine, estuarine, lagoon, riverine, lake, tank and pond fisheries—the meeting illustrated the heterogeneity, diversity and complexity of Indian small-scale fisheries. It provided an opportunity to understand the status of inland and marine fisheries in the context of food security and poverty alleviation. It highlighted good practices in small-scale fisheries management and development, and in welfare and social-security measures; it also identified gaps that need urgent attention.

The Kolkata meeting revealed how the fisheries sector receives the lowest priority in comparison with forestry, agriculture and industry, and how the legitimate livelihood interests of fishers and fishing communities are often overlooked in inter-sector conflicts over land and water resources. Fishing community representatives who spoke at the meeting sought protection of their fundamental right to life and

livelihood, and their right to be treated with dignity. More than anything else, the meeting underscored the importance of adopting a rights based approach to development in the case of vulnerable fishing communities, and the need for developing guidelines on securing sustainable small-scale fisheries within a pro-poor, human-rights and ecosystem-based framework. A significant outcome of the meeting was the clarification of the term 'small-scale fisheries' in the Indian context.

At least nine similar meetings are scheduled to be held under the auspices of civil society organizations such as the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) and the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF) during the next three months to contribute to the guidelines process. These are to be held in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Thailand, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, Brazil, Honduras and Costa Rica. The Senegal meeting will have participants from 12 countries in west Africa.



These meetings, as in the case of the Kolkata workshop and symposium, are meant to contribute to clarifying small-scale fisheries in different parts of the world, to document good practices in small-scale fisheries, and to identify threats facing small-scale fisheries and fishing communities. They are expected to improve the visibility of small-scale fisheries at the regional, national and local levels, to open up channels of communication between the State and civil society organizations, and to influence government positions on the proposed guidelines during the FAO technical consultation in mid-2012.

This is the first time that several meetings are being organized under the auspices of civil society organizations in preparation for a proposed FAO fishery instrument. These meetings and their pertinent outcomes should be seen by the FAO Member States and the Secretariat as an opportunity to benefit from a bottom-up process to develop meaningful, voluntary guidelines on securing sustainable small-scale fisheries, to complement the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. They should also be seen as a promising beginning to broadening the participation of civil society organizations in the fisheries work of FAO. 3