

BOOK

Community fisheries organizations of Cambodia: Sharing processes, results and lessons learned in the context of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines

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This booklet, authored by John Kurien and published by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, brings together important insights on community empowerment in the traditional fisheries in Cambodia gleaned through field work and consultations undertaken between 2012 and 2015.

Part I of the booklet, based on the experience of Cambodia, outlines a participatory process for evolving national guidelines for sustainable small-scale fisheries. It contains insights into the nature of small-scale fisheries, from different stakeholder perspectives; the evolution in objectives and governance within the communities over time; the views that communities hold for their own futures; and suggestions for incorporating these insights into a national policy framework.

The analysis is set in the context of a decade of change, from 2001 to 2011, when the fisheries sector in Cambodia received relatively greater community focus, with government support and enabling legislative measures. The proposed new guidelines in Cambodia covered recommendations for the internal structure of community fisheries; for the establishment of clear tenure rights; for structuring activities and finances, including access to external financial support, and promoting self-financing by communities; as well as establishing a system of information, monitoring and networking.

Part II of the booklet analyses the rapid disappearance of 'commons' within global communities, in the context of an accelerated development of private property in rural tenure regimes. In the context, the initiative

in Cambodia since 2001, which supported the idea of 'community commons', is a unique example of the attempt to honour the rights of traditional fishing communities. The initiative also upholds Para 5.8 of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines) which calls upon states to "facilitate equitable access to fishery resources for small-scale fishing communities". In 2015, Cambodia had a reported 507 community fisheries institutions. The analysis looked at data from 13 of these community fisheries institutions, and used structured interviews and questionnaires to understand if these organizations truly represented examples of modern day 'commons'. The analysis found that only three of the 13 initiatives studied were functioning well, and could be truly called 'commons'; while three were doing badly and seven others had middling levels of performance.

The insights presented in the booklet allow an understanding of the possibilities for sustainable community organizations in the fisheries sector. This is significant, given the adverse conditions faced by most traditional fisheries organizations across the world. The possibility of developing a national supportive framework is valuable for community organizations in the field. However, as the author himself suggests, Cambodia represents a unique case in the attempt of the government to promote guidelines supporting fishing communities. Even within the country, it took a decade of advocacy for guidelines to get formulated and implemented. Further, even with supportive action, only three out of 13, or less than 25 per cent, of the traditional fisheries organizations in the country were seen as representing successfully functioning 'commons'. Clearly, traditional fishing communities still have a long struggle ahead. ❏



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Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 1200 words. They could deal with issues that are of direct relevance to women and men of fishing communities. They could also focus on recent research or on meetings and workshops that have raised gender issues in fisheries. Also welcome are life stories of women

and men of fishing communities working towards a sustainable fishery or for a recognition of their work within the fishery. Please also include a one-line biographical note on the writer.

Please do send us comments and suggestions to make the newsletter more relevant. We look forward to hearing from you and to receiving regular write-ups for the newsletter.