

Small-scale fisheries centre stage

A new report attempts to use data to help put small-scale fisheries at the centre stage of fisheries research

The Fisheries Centre of the University of British Columbia, Canada, has released a research report on small-scale fisheries around the world. Titled *Bottom-Up, Global Estimates of Small-Scale Marine Fisheries Catches*, the report has been written by Ratana Chuenpagdee, Lisa Liguori, Maria L.D. Palomares and Daniel Pauly.

Part of the Centre's *Sea Around Us* Project, the report is an attempt to help put small-scale fisheries at the centre stage of fisheries research. It aims to provide bottom-up (national) estimates of small-scale fisheries catches and related statistics for each maritime country, and then aggregate them at the global level. These data will allow dealing with small-scale fisheries at the same scale as large-scale fisheries, and thus enable more complete analyses of fisheries than has been possible to date. Besides catch data, the report provides national definition of small-scale fisheries, gear used, catch composition, number of fishers, number of boats and involvement of women and children, from sources such as Fisheries Country Profiles of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and other reports and documents.

The database contains information about small-scale fisheries in 140 coastal countries; about 60 per cent of the information is from non-FAO sources. About 70 per cent of the countries characterize their small-scale fisheries using boat size, with the most common categories being less than 10, 12 or 15 m, or between 5-7 m in length. Other characteristics used are gross registered tonnage (GRT), engine size and types of gear. Overall, despite the uniqueness of small-scale fisheries in each location, demarcations between small-scale and

large-scale fisheries are generally similar. More importantly, there are sufficient commonalities among countries in how they define and characterize small-scale fisheries that it is possible to generate data for countries without information from those with data, based on consistent rules.

In his foreword, Daniel Pauly, Director of the Centre, writes: "Working on small-scale fisheries often means being torn between two opposites. On one end are those who think that this is a waste of time because, 'after all, industrial fisheries in the South and the North provide the bulk of the fish' [a true, and typical, quote, from an author who shall remain unnamed]."

"This standpoint seems to be justified because for most countries the official statistics do not identify small-scale fisheries, suggesting such catch, if any, is negligible," Pauly continues.

"At the other end are cultural anthropologists and other social scientists, asserting in thesis after thesis and paper after paper that small-scale fisheries are important in the villages they studied, but numbers on catch, fishing effort and other metrics cannot be given, because everything is so complex. Indeed, one is often told by social scientists that catches are not the issue, but instead the catching itself, and the culture that develops around it.

Missing numbers

The first line of these arguments will be perceived as being correct as long as hard numbers are missing which would document in a compelling fashion that small-scale fisheries, rather than being marginal activities conducted by marginal people, are a vibrant part of the rural economy of numerous countries,

providing livelihood to millions of people, besides increasingly feeding into national and international markets.

The second line of arguments, while central to the discipline of, for example, cultural anthropology, indirectly contributes to the marginalization of small-scale fisheries. In the excitement of documenting unique aspects of the maritime culture they study, and of describing its specialized systems of resource use, the larger context is often ignored, and the small-scale fishers and their families are not seen as actors on the national or international stage.

Both of these lines of arguments can be overcome by making the case that small-scale fisheries, rather than being a marginal sub-sector, represent, in most countries, most of the people working in fisheries, and generating nearly half of the fish and invertebrate catch, often of high values, destined for human consumption. The numbers assembled in this report support such a case.

Moreover, because they use far less fuel energy than industrial fisheries per tonne of fish landed, small-scale fisheries may point to, or even be, the future of fisheries in a world economy shaped by high fuel cost.

The conclusions of this report are tentative, however, because the database upon which they are based covers the world very unevenly. This can be addressed by exposing the content of this database to a wide audience, from which the complements and corrections will emerge that will make this database more complete and reliable, and, hopefully, more useful," concludes Pauly.

More information on the report is available at http://www.fisheries.ubc.ca/publications/reports/report14_8.php. The entire report can be downloaded from http://www.fisheries.ubc.ca/publications/reports/14_8.pdf