

Shepherding SSF

The following is the first in a series on the role of FAO and its Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in promoting small-scale fisheries (SSF)

Although the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) did recognize the social dimension of fisheries as far back as 1945—the year of its establishment—the issue was ignored for nearly 30 years as governments around the world sought to increase fish production.

The *Commission A*, set up in 1945 by the First Session of the FAO Conference—its supreme governing body—observed that fishers and shore workers were in the low-income group of labour and recommended that FAO study the relation of fishery products to production and employment, to general well-being and public health, to occupational hazards and diseases, to opportunities for education and community life, and to the problems of collective bargaining and labour organization.

This recognition was, however, sidetracked for over 25 years for rehabilitating fishing industries devastated by the Second World War, especially by building up of fishing fleets, and the development of fisheries in developing countries. The slogan of the Fisheries Division set up in 1946—later upgraded to the status of a Department in 1965—was “The harvest awaits the reaper”, which aimed to encourage exploitation of both inland and marine fishing grounds in various parts of the world in order to secure greater fisheries production, especially to alleviate world food shortage, through the application of modern commercial practices and equipment, including small-boat mechanization and improvement of fishing gear and methods.

Although the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) was established by the FAO Conference in 1965—it precedes the Committee on Forests, the Committee on Agriculture, and the Committee on World Food Security—the first reference to ‘artisanal fishermen’ in FAO statutory reports was made when the Report of the Sixteenth Session of the FAO Conference in 1971 observed: “The large number of artisanal fishermen in most parts of the world deserved special help and their needs for a sustainable fishery should be given particular attention.” The same Conference noted with concern that

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exploitation into offshore waters sometimes resulted in depleting fish stocks in coastal waters, which were the mainstay of artisanal fisheries.

At the Seventh Session of COFI in 1972, a background paper on artisanal fisheries was presented for the first time. The paper, titled “Artisanal Fisheries in Developing Countries”, estimated nearly 90 per cent of the 10.2 mn fishers in the world as artisanal fishers in 1972. They included all fishers of developing countries.

No general agreement

The paper noted artisanal fisheries were to be found mainly in coastal, estuary, river or lake fisheries in developing countries, and that there was no general agreement as

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to what was an artisanal fishery. The paper employed several negative attributes to characterize artisanal fisheries in developing countries: low capital investment; low level of organization; little use of specialized skills; small vessels; hand-operated fishing gear; low productivity and income; inadequate infrastructure and credit; and catch sold in the fresh, salted, dried or smoked form in local markets.

Rather than adopt a sectoral perspective, the paper sought to locate the problems of artisanal fisheries within the context of general welfare policies. It observed that for most countries, social objectives such as employment and living standards of fishers were more important than economic objectives related to the contribution of artisanal fisheries to the market economy. It argued that “artificial preservation of marginal fisheries should not be accepted as a legitimate long-run development target” and advocated a natural “withering away” of artisanal fisheries.

In the same COFI meeting, L J C Evans, Director, Agriculture Projects, Department of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) of the World Bank, spoke in

artisanal fisheries mainly exploited fishing grounds and resources that were of little interest to industrial fisheries, and recognized the importance of artisanal fisheries for local consumption and export. The Conference acknowledged the role of artisanal fisheries in providing employment and in raising the standard of living in remote fishing communities. The Conference proposed an integrated approach for the development of artisanal fisheries, and recommended that FAO intensify its activities in assisting the development of artisanal fisheries.

The Ninth Session of COFI was held in 1974 in the backdrop of the Third United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Hamilton Shirley Amarasinghe, President of UNCLOS, spoke at this session about the principle of international social justice and fisheries. Small-scale fisheries were dealt with in a comprehensive fashion at this session, which could boast of several firsts for FAO in relation to small-scale fisheries. It was, for the first time, that a separate agenda item on small-scale fisheries was included (agenda item 5). It was also for the first time that FAO used the term ‘small-scale’ fisheries in lieu of ‘artisanal’ fisheries.

The 1974 COFI session was also the first FAO meeting to talk about small-scale operators and their families. It was concerned that in spite of many efforts to improve the state of small-scale fisheries, the people engaged in these activities and their families continued to live at the margin of subsistence and human dignity. The importance of small-scale fisheries as a source of vital protein food supplies and employment was recognized. The Committee emphasized the significant role of small-scale operators in the fisheries not only of developing countries but also of industrialized countries.

Watershed meet

The 1974 COFI was a watershed for small-scale fisheries. It sought the highest priority for improving small-scale fisheries to address the problem

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support of incentivizing production and of the need to maintain both a traditional and a modern fishing industry, especially from an employment perspective: “How can we improve efficiency in production without reducing the employment opportunities in the fishery industry?” he asked. He suggested disseminating improved technology to enhance productivity and reduce costs, without worsening the gap between a small, prosperous modernized industry and a traditional fishing industry.

The Seventeenth Session of the FAO Conference in 1973 observed that

of small-scale operators through the implementation of action projects. The Committee also recognized that improving the state of small-scale fisheries and operators required not only technological and scientific inputs but also an overall approach with due regard for “social, economic, cultural, and political aspects.”

The Committee recommended that national governments integrate small-scale fisheries into overall economic and social-development programmes within the framework of rural development. In the light of UNCLOS and the prospects of expanding national jurisdiction in the marine space, the Committee sensed greater opportunities and responsibilities for small-scale fishers. As a remedy for protecting small-scale fishers from industrial fisheries, the Committee suggested reserving specific fishing areas for the small-scale fishery. A designated fishing zone for protecting small-scale fishers suggested at this session was another first.

Since regions around the world had many conditions and problems in common, COFI favoured a regional approach to small-scale fisheries development. Pilot operations and model projects with multiplier effects were expected to “gradually lead to global concepts and policy guidelines for small-scale fishery development”.

The Committee, in this context, initiated a preparatory project for the development of small-scale fisheries in west and south Asia. It stressed the need for continuous assessment of project results, to use evaluation criteria such as ‘social rate of return’ for development action and investment projects in the sector, and to ensure full consideration of the social benefits and general contribution of rural and coastal development.

The Committee sought to organize regional seminars to examine the whole range of small-scale fisheries development, and to later hold a technical conference on small-scale fisheries. The Committee was informed about two meetings to be organized on small-scale fisheries in



In an Indonesian village (*kampong*), a mass opening (*misa lefa*) of the fishing season takes place every year on 12 May. Fish landed by SSF is the main source of animal protein for many local populations

1975 and 1976. The first was a regional seminar on small-scale fisheries to be organized by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Central America in 1975. The second was an international meeting on post-harvest problems in small-scale fisheries to be organized by the erstwhile Tropical Products Institute of the United Kingdom in 1976.

The Committee was also informed about the availability of fellowships for courses on fishery co-operatives organized annually by the Japanese Co-operation Agency. Some of the members that had received technical assistance from bilateral or multilateral courses for small-scale fisheries development—namely, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Senegal, Sri Lanka and Uruguay—referred to a number of successful schemes that could serve as models for other countries.

Initial support

The Representative of the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) stated that the small-scale fisheries development project proposal for west and south Asia had received initial support, that projects for various other regions, like the South Pacific, Africa (inland fisheries) and Latin America, were under consideration, and that UNDP was also considering the possibility of

financing an international project on small-scale fisheries development. The Committee also noted increasing attention being given by the World Bank to integrated rural development, and expressed its hope that small-scale fisheries development would form an important part of this programme.

In considering various specific aspects of small-scale fisheries, the Committee emphasized the

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interdisciplinary nature of assistance requirements. Improvement of boats, gear, processing, storage, transport, distribution and credit availability was to be complemented by social and community developments, such as health services and schools. The Committee stressed the establishment of well-organized fishers' co-operatives for small-scale operators to break the dependence on intermediaries and to improve returns to the producer. Training in business management was an important element in successful fishers' co-operative development, it observed. The Committee pointed out the possibilities existing in rural aquaculture schemes for small-scale fisheries development.

The Committee referred to the United Nations (UN) World Food Conference, to be held in Rome in November 1974, and urged that the contribution of the small-scale fishery sector be given appropriate attention at the event. The Committee also suggested that the topic of small-scale fisheries feature regularly on the agenda of COFI in order to give it an opportunity to examine progress in the field.

Although there was no separate agenda item on small-scale fisheries, the Tenth Session of COFI in 1975 more or less reiterated the importance of small-scale fisheries. While upholding the employment dimension of the subsector, its non-profitability

was flagged for the first time, and emphasis was laid on building production, supply and credit co-operatives for small-scale fishers.

The Eighteenth Session of the FAO Conference in 1975, which followed the 1974 and 1975 COFI sessions, agreed with the COFI recommendations. It appreciated the growing awareness about the centrality of small-scale fisheries development to the improvement of the social and economic life of rural communities. It agreed that the problems of small-scale fisheries development had economic, social and cultural dimensions much wider than just providing pure technology. The Conference stressed FAO's role in the field, and emphasized that it should pay greater attention to the problems of the small-scale fishers.

The Conference also called for greater attention to be paid to environmental problems such as pollution, in relation to fisheries, particularly those in inland waters and coastal areas, both in developed and developing countries. The importance of these problems was emphasized, and FAO was urged to take a more active part in collaborating closely with organizations and bodies dealing with these problems. It was pointed out in this context that "conflicts in use of coastal zones were assuming a greater importance and the claims of fisheries were often being overlooked". The Conference asked FAO to maintain close links with other bodies involved in coastal area development and to co-ordinate these activities within the UN system in order to protect the living resources.

Poverty eradication

The Eleventh (1977), Twelfth (1978) and Thirteenth (1979) sessions of COFI were fairly uneventful in terms of small-scale fisheries, except that during the 1978 Session, for the first time, some delegations urged COFI to give attention to the formulation of policies on small-scale fishery development programmes to eradicate poverty in fishing communities. It is rather surprising that the first Expert Consultation on Small-

scale Fisheries Development, held in Rome in 1975, found no mention in the Eleventh Session of COFI (1977), which was the first COFI to be held after this Consultation.

The Fourteenth Session of COFI in 1981 was the first to recognize small-scale fisheries for its positive attributes. Reference was made, for the first time, to the greater employment generated per unit of capital investment in small-scale fisheries than in industrial fisheries. Several delegations referred to programmes designed to assist the small-scale fisheries. These included subsidies for motorization, the use of motorized vessels and for training of fishers. Problems of rising fuel costs were mentioned by most delegations, and means were sought to reduce fuel consumption. These included the development of lower-horsepower engines as well as provision of subsidies to help maintain the viability of sail-powered vessels. This also seems to be the first session that had the participation of an international non-governmental organization (NGO), the erstwhile World Confederation of Labour.

The Fifteenth Session of COFI in 1983 had a substantive focus on small-scale fisheries. In his keynote address to this Session, Edouard Saouma, Director-General of FAO, spoke about the vital role of small-scale fisheries, stressing their social dimension. Small-scale or artisanal fisheries, he said, accounted for about 25 per cent of the world catch and provided about 40 per cent of the total supply of food fish. Small-scale fisheries, although probably supplying less than a quarter of the catch in Latin America, accounted for two-thirds of the fish landed in Asia and about five-sixths of the total in Africa. In the least developed countries of Asia and Africa, they provided over three-quarters of domestic fish supplies. Despite their vital role, small-scale fishers generally occupied the lowest stratum in society. Located in isolated areas, often lacking the most basic amenities, they formed one of the poorest and most neglected of rural communities. Close parallels existed

between the small-scale fishers and the poor farmers and landless labourers. The guidelines prepared to follow up the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development applied equally to poor fishing communities, the Director-General clarified.

The drive to produce fish supplies beyond immediate needs must be generated by the prospect of a reasonable financial return, he added. All too often, planners neglected the social and economic expectations of the people involved in small-scale fisheries. The management challenge should be to satisfy these expectations. For example, those engaged in these fisheries must enjoy adequate access to resources—financial as well as biological—and to markets. It would also be necessary to use subsidies and other devices to make sure that the burden of feeding poor consumers was not laid on the shoulders of even poorer fishers. The role of women in these fisheries should be emphasized. In some parts of the developing world, women were responsible for almost all the local trade in food fish. They usually also played a key part in processing the catch. Any development plan should take into account their essential contribution, he observed.

With local participation, access to resources and a sympathetic govern-

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ment, considerable opportunities existed to encourage self-help and progress in small-scale fisheries at comparatively little financial cost. The results would be to increase fish production and, at the same time, help relieve the social and economic distress of millions of people.

New approach

The Director-General also stressed the need for a new approach to fisheries management whereby more emphasis

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Artisanal purse-seiners landing anchovies in Pisco in the south of Peru. The physical requirements of many SSF call for the improvement and adaptation of vessels and gear to meet changing conditions

It highlighted the importance of small-scale fisheries in the context of social and economic development. The Committee noted that in many countries, fish landed by small-scale fisheries was the main source of animal protein for the local population. It also stressed the importance of small-scale fisheries in providing employment. The Committee noted that it was difficult to reduce the number of active fishers as a possible means to limit fishing pressure on scarce resources. It suggested reallocation of labour could sometimes be brought about by the provision of employment in processing, marketing, mariculture or other related ancillary sectors.

Although marine capture fisheries were often emphasized in international meetings, production from inland waters was extremely important for many countries, it was pointed out. In this connection, it was stressed that increased co-operation in research, management and development was called for where inland waterways and lakes were shared by several countries.

The Committee agreed that an integrated approach was essential for successful, sustained small-scale fisheries development and management. The concept of an integrated approach was broadened to mean integration of not only components in the production chain, such as resource management, capture, processing, transport, marketing, credit and supply of inputs, but also the social and economic welfare of the small-scale fishing communities themselves. The importance of community participation in planning of development projects was flagged. Mobilization of local skills and involvement of women in the development process were also recognized for the first time.

NGO role

NGOs, it was noted, could contribute effectively and inexpensively to an integrated approach at the village level. Sustained improvement in the sector usually required assistance over long periods of time, as shown

was put on the social and economic importance of fisheries and not restricted simply to maintaining fish stocks and improving physical yields.

Fisheries management should no longer consist largely of endorsing or rejecting the advice of fisheries scientists, and all actors must be brought into the main plot. Fisheries management and development must take central stage in government planning, policymaking and allocation of resources, he said.

The special problems of small-scale fisheries was introduced as a sub-item during this Session of COFI, under agenda item 4 (Key issues for fisheries management and development), and it led to the most substantive discussion of small-scale fisheries since the beginning of FAO. In addition to reiterating an integrated approach, a new emphasis was put on management of small-scale fisheries. The Committee observed that small-scale fisheries were one of the priority areas in the context of fisheries development and management, and this fact should be reflected in the strategy for fishery management and development and the associated action programmes.

The Committee observed that the 1984 World Conference on Fisheries Management and Development presented a timely and valuable opportunity to examine the role and needs of small-scale fisheries.

by examples of notable socioeconomic success.

For the first time, excessive fishing pressure on limited stocks and the need for regulatory measures in small-scale fisheries that were often in competition with industrialized and medium-scale fishing vessels for the same nearshore resource, were flagged by the Committee. It pointed out the importance of continuing stock assessment as a base on which to build and revise small-scale fisheries development and management plans. It was emphasized that, as far as possible, regulatory measures needed to be formulated in close consultation with the fishers, to ensure their implementation. Lagoons, estuaries and rivers were often in particular need of protection from both overfishing and pollution. The Committee pointed out that the traditional fisheries-management systems that existed in many areas could sometimes be used as models for other areas. Some countries requested FAO to assist them in drafting management regulations for the protection of small scale fisheries.

The Committee noted the paucity of reliable data for management. The multispecies nature of many fisheries, especially in tropical areas, called for new analytical methods as well as technical co-operation and training.

The Committee paid special attention to the need for international co-operation in the development of effective fisheries administrations. Administrators and organizational/business managers must be trained for the small-scale fisheries sector. A lack of such skills was limiting the absorptive capacities of many developing countries. Such training was particularly urgent for small island States. Regional training programmes and pooling of high-level expertise with FAO assistance could accelerate improvements, it was suggested.

The problems posed by the physical requirements of many small-scale fisheries call for the improvement and adaptation of vessels and gear to meet changing conditions. Maximum use should be made of locally available materials and sources of energy. The

useful work already undertaken by FAO and other bodies in this respect was noted, and it was suggested that further regional training courses in boat construction and operation should be organized with the assistance of FAO and other international agencies.

The Committee emphasized the importance of improved methods of fish handling, processing, transport and marketing in small-scale fisheries in order to reduce post-harvest losses. This was the first time that post-harvest losses in small-scale fisheries were receiving the attention of COFI.

The lack of adequate financing and credit lines posed strong limitations for improving the lot of small-scale fishers. The Committee drew attention to various schemes that have been used to assist the small-scale fishers outside the traditional forms of credit, including subsidizing boats, equipment and fuel, the provision of loans through rural banks and fishers' co-operatives, as well as exemption from import duties and taxes. The lack of foreign exchange needed to import spare parts, materials and fuel was a problem for small-scale operators in many countries.

The assistance and support that governments of interested countries could give to small-scale fisheries was considered to be essential. In addition to support through resource management, subsidies and credit, governments needed to provide technical assistance, training, market regulation and land-based infrastructure.

The Committee noted the importance of fishers' organizations for development. Though not always successful, co-operatives were indicated by many delegations as possible organizational structures that could get substantial government support.

Fishers' organizations

Many experiments with other types of fishers' organizations were being attempted, ranging from 'fisheries extension service societies' to State enterprises for small-scale fisheries. It was often difficult to convince small-scale fishers to

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Unloading catch from plank-built canoe in Alappuzha, Kerala, India. Any development plan should take into account the essential contribution and role of women in fisheries

be further developed. The trained persons must be utilized properly and provided with the essential tools to put their training to good use.

The often slow delivery of project inputs by international funding and executing agencies after signing agreements was commented upon. The Committee recommended that ways be found to speed up the delivery of projects. When possible, regional or sub-regional funds must be established for the development of small-scale fisheries.

The Committee felt that FAO had an important role to play in assisting Member Countries with the development and management of their small-scale fisheries. FAO's involvement should include a catalytic, advisory, training, and demonstration role in all aspects of small-scale fisheries. Particular attention was drawn to the need for assistance in project planning and the co-ordination of regional groups.

The Twenty-second Session of the Conference of FAO in 1983, which followed the Fifteenth Session of COFI, emphasized the high priority that should be given to the management and development of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture, and the central role played by women in the sector. It also stressed the necessity of adopting an integrated approach to the development of small-scale fisheries, with due recognition to social and economic aspects. It therefore recommended that the 1984 World Fisheries Conference consider this subject in detail. 3

collectivize; there was thus a clear need for strong, effective guidance and training in support of fishers' organizations, and for full participation of fishermen and women in their own organizations.

The Committee considered fisheries extension services to be among the weakest links in the existing small-scale fisheries development structure. Many extension services lacked a systematic approach and organizational framework, as well as good, well-trained supervisors and expert extension agents willing to live and work at the village level. Extension services were often not well integrated into small-scale fisheries development plans. Assistance was needed for the training of new extension agents and the upgrading of those already in the field.

The Committee pointed out that training was an essential ingredient for improving all aspects of small-scale fisheries. Although the training of small-scale fisherfolk themselves must necessarily be a national concern, there was wide scope for international co-operation in the training of fisheries officers, technical specialists and administrators at all levels. Exchange of experts, the use of specialists from the region as workshop instructors, and the deployment of regional technical centres for high-level specialists should

For more

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