

COFI

Case for small-scale fisheries

At the 25th Session on the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), the following NGO statement was issued

We welcome the attention given by COFI to defining *Strategies for Increasing the Contribution of Small-scale Fisheries to Food Security and Poverty Alleviation*.

Such a focus is urgent in a context where, on the one hand many populations are facing a growing crisis of food insecurity and poverty, whilst, on the other, the fish stocks that provide human food are being overfished to below sustainable levels.

The case for small-scale fisheries

It is important to recognize that in the developing world, for millions of fishworkers and their families in coastal fishing communities, life is characterized by poverty, social and economic vulnerability, insecure access rights to land and sea resources to which they have traditionally enjoyed access and lack of alternative employment possibilities. In poor, labour-surplus fishing economies, artisanal and small-scale fisheries are an important vehicle for poverty eradication and greater food security. It is as important to note that the case for supporting small-scale fisheries is equally strong on environmental grounds.

Voluntary guidelines on the right to food

We welcome the suggestion to the committee to develop technical guidelines on increasing the contribution of small-scale fisheries to food security and poverty alleviation under the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. We also welcome the decision by the FAO to develop "Voluntary guidelines to achieve the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food", and see these as linked and complementary processes.

We feel that food security and poverty alleviation should become issues cutting

across all programme areas taken up by the Fisheries Department, in keeping with the FAO mandate to alleviate poverty and hunger and to raise levels of nutrition and standards of living.

It is our view that the Guidelines would have to address the following issues, towards strengthening the contribution of small-scale fisheries to food security and poverty alleviation.

Secure access rights

The actions proposed towards supporting the sector are to be welcomed especially the emphasis on ensuring better management through the allocation of secure fishing rights to small-scale fishers backed by appropriate legislation. We also welcome the emphasis on the need to protect small-scale fishers from industrial fishing activity or activities that degrade aquatic resources and habitats.

We feel that it is essential that governments extend the areas reserved for exclusive exploitation by the artisanal fleet, within their EEZs, in view of the increasing technological capacity of the small-scale fleet to harvest resources in deeper waters. It is equally important to increase monitoring, control and surveillance of these zones to protect the livelihoods of small-scale fishworkers.

We also urge States to ensure secure access to the lands and beaches traditionally used by fishing communities, in the face of the increasing pressure on coastal areas in many parts of the world.

Secure access rights are particularly important when low-income food-deficit countries are faced with the dilemma of whether to sell off fishing rights to distant water fleets or to develop their small-scale and artisanal fishing sectors. We note with

concern the trends towards establishing private property regimes through transferable quota systems, and international trade arrangements that promote speculation and put small-scale fisheries at a competitive disadvantage. We feel that international arrangements that trade off fishing access rights against concessions in other sectors (such as access to markets) jeopardize the achievement of sustainable patterns of exploitation and undermine attempts to promote food security and poverty alleviation.

Formation and strengthening of fishworker organizations

We strongly support the suggested actions to encourage the formation of fishworker organisations and to facilitate the representation of men and women of fishing communities in decision-making processes at various levels. Such actions will also need to include capacity building and awareness raising components, and to provide the financial and human resources needed.

In this context, we welcome the opening up of FAO to the participation of NGOs and Civil Society Organisations, especially of those that represent small-scale and artisanal fishworkers. With some notable exceptions, and until relatively recently, organizations representing fishworkers have been excluded from the FAO decision-making processes.

Fish trade

We welcome the importance accorded to supporting small-scale processing and marketing activities (post-harvest sector), where women play a vital role, and the recognition of the role of these activities in contributing to food security and poverty alleviation. In most parts of the developing world, to address food insecurity and poverty, greater support to the work of small-scale women fish processors and traders is urgently needed, as is the need to provide impetus for developing local and intra-regional trade in artisanally processed fish products.

Whilst international trade in fishery products may provide an important source of foreign exchange earnings to low income, food deficit countries, there is a need to ensure that such trade does not jeopardize the contribution of fisheries to meeting local food security. We fully support the proposal to develop technical guidelines for the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries to promote the contribution of fish trade to food security.

Transboundary issues

Due to both resource depletion and technological advances, the small-scale sector is increasingly targeting resources, such as tuna, beyond territorial waters. We urge coastal States to take into account the migration patterns of small-scale fleets in negotiating access agreements and in regional management initiatives.

Adequate attention, however, needs to be paid to aspects that relate to safety at sea.

Recognizing and supporting the rights of small-scale fleets to access and harvest, in a selective manner, stocks that straddle and migrate across marine boundaries, could contribute significantly to greater employment and food security. It would also be in keeping with the provisions of Article 24 (b) of the Fish Stocks Agreement, emphasising the “need to avoid adverse impacts on, and ensure access to fisheries by, subsistence, small-scale and artisanal fishers and women fishworkers, as well as indigenous people in developing States, particularly small island developing States”.

A failure to do so has led to small-scale fishermen being detained and arrested in foreign countries. In some cases, these fishermen, whose only fault has been to catch a few tonnes of fish for their livelihood, have spent several years in prisons of other countries, in contravention of Article 73 of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. We urge States to respect their international obligations and release and repatriate arrested fishermen on a priority basis. A mechanism to address these problems in a speedy and socially responsible manner is urgently needed.

Subsidies and labelling schemes

We urge States to implement incentive and other support schemes to assist small-scale fishers in fisheries management. This would include providing subsidies and incentives for selective harvesting and promoting fishery products that are harvested and processed in a socially and environmentally friendly manner, including through labelling. We note with concern that certain aspects of certification schemes marginalize small-scale and artisanal fishers, including high cost of certification, inappropriate criteria and complex procedures,

Ecosystem-based fisheries management

We support an ecosystem-based fisheries management, particularly in the context of reducing or eliminating unsustainable fishing practices, such as bottom trawling

in tropical multi-species fisheries. We underline the importance of an inclusive approach, where humans are included as a central part of the ecosystem. This is particularly important given the experience of conservation efforts that have had negative consequences for subsistence level and highly fishery dependent populations, whose activities have relatively minimal ecological footprints.

Aquaculture

The role that aquaculture could play in increasing food security and reducing poverty should not be underestimated. However, we note with concern that certain aspects of aquaculture development undermine the achievement of both these goals. In particular, aquaculture development in many countries has displaced fishing communities from their homes, and restricted their access to the sea. The destruction of important marine habitats, wetlands and mangrove areas to make way for intensive aquaculture units is alarming.

We would, therefore, urge delegates to promote a precautionary approach to further developments, and to support research on the potential impact of aquaculture on wild fisheries, and especially on the livelihoods of small-scale fishworkers.

There is also a need to factor in and minimize the environmental and social costs of intensive production systems, including wetland and mangrove conversion, capture of fry from inshore waters, biotechnology, and input and waste aspects.

Information on small-scale fisheries

We urge States to take up the issue of collecting and analysing data on socioeconomic aspects of fisheries, the importance of which has been recognized by the Technical Consultation on Improving Information on the Status and Trends of Capture Fisheries. Emphasis should be placed equally on gathering data on the status of those who harvest the resources as on the status of the resources themselves. Given the relative invisibility of the artisanal and small-scale sector, particularly of women within the sector, it



is imperative to capture, in full, its economic and social contribution to employment, income and food security.

This statement was endorsed by the following organizations present at COFI:

1. World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP)
2. World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF)
3. International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)
4. West African Programme for the Development of Artisanal Fisheries (WADAF)
5. Greenpeace
6. World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) 3

This statement was issued on 26 February 2003 at the 25th Session of COFI in Rome