

# An enabling environment

## The recent meeting of the Committee on Fisheries saw lengthy and lively discussions

The 26th session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was held from 7 to 11 March 2005 at Rome. Delegates from Member States, as well as observers from the United Nations (UN), UN bodies and specialized agencies, regional fishery bodies, other international organizations, and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended.

The 8th Item on the Agenda was Enabling Responsible Small-scale Fisheries through the Creation of a Supportive Environment.

The background document provided by FAO argued that only through the creation of an enabling environment can small-scale fisheries fulfill its potential to contribute to reaching the important goals of poverty alleviation and food security as stipulated in the World Food Summit and the Millennium Declaration.

It highlighted a number of strategies that can be employed to facilitate small-scale fisheries operations, including changes to fisheries policy and legislation, improving non-fisheries policy and legislative environment, tailoring fisheries management regimes, facilitating financial arrangements, improving information, developing human capacity and making markets work for small-scale fishers.

COFI was invited to review the paper and provide guidance to Member Nations, FAO and other agencies and international organizations on strategies that might ensure an enabling environment for small-scale fisheries.

COFI was also invited to consider whether an amendment would be needed to the

FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries to include an article on small-scale fisheries.

During the lengthy and lively discussions and debate on this agenda item, several Member States strongly supported the amendment of the Code to include an article on small-scale fisheries, or the inclusion of an annexure to the Code on small-scale fisheries. Thailand, Canada, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Afghanistan, Mauritania, St. Lucia, Japan, Grenada, Indonesia, Sudan, Libya and Oman supported an amendment of the Code. The Philippines pointed out that, despite the importance of small-scale fisheries, only two articles in the Code address small-scale fisheries.

Mauritania stressed that the Code should not be seen as set in stone, and should be amendable to take into account changing realities. Yemen also stressed that the Code, rather than being considered sacred, should be seen as 'updatable', and that options, such as including an annexure to the Code on small-scale fisheries, could be considered.

On the other hand, the European Commission, while supporting the technical guidelines under the Code on increasing the contribution of small-scale fisheries to food security and poverty alleviation, expressed reservations about the need for re-opening the Code itself for discussion. Brazil said that it did not support an amendment to the Code, and preferred instead, the adoption of other strategies to provide an enabling framework for the development of small-scale fisheries.

### Technical guidelines

The United States (US), while welcoming the document on this agenda item and

many of the strategies outlined therein, said it did not support an amendment to the Code. The US delegate stressed that the technical guidelines that have been developed under the Code are a better option.

**F**urther, the US delegate noted, amending the Code may lead the way towards reopening other articles of the Code. Senegal said that while it supported the conclusion of the document, it did not consider it necessary to amend the Code. The focus, instead, should be on more practical work in support of small-scale fisheries.

The Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organization, stressing the importance of the small-scale sector, proposed the setting up of a Sub-committee on Small-scale Fisheries. The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) extended support to the position of several Member States favouring an amendment, or the addition of an annexure, to the Code on small-scale fisheries.

Referring to the background document, India, Zimbabwe and Mauritania stressed the importance of including inland fisheries within the scope of the guidelines, given the importance of this sub-sector in meeting food security needs, and the unique sets of issues facing it.

Norway said that some aspects would need to be developed further in the documentation prepared by the Secretariat. There was a need to elaborate more the development dilemmas that may be faced by policymakers. Small-scale fisheries, for example, fulfils an important 'safety valve' function for the poor.

However, open access to the resource also leads to depletion, and it is essential that the FAO guidelines address clearly this issue and bring out the choices that will need to be made. Norway also stressed the need to strike a balance between utilization and conservation.

Grenada said that more attention needs to be given to safety issues, as well as to economic and technological issues. The importance of safety at sea and of the need for reducing loss of life at sea was also stressed by Canada, as was the importance of promoting South-South transfer of technology.

Referring to the recommendation on the better utilization of by-catch from industrial fisheries in the document, Canada cautioned that this should not disrupt the market for the catch from small-scale fisheries.

#### **Fisherfolk organizations**

Gabon said that more attention was needed towards developing

organizations of fisherfolk. At the same time, specific financing mechanisms were also required. Ghana highlighted the importance of focusing on children in fishing communities. Thailand said that it was important to pay attention to factors such as high oil prices that affected livelihoods in small-scale fisheries.

**S**t. Lucia highlighted the need for an internationally accepted definition of small-scale fisheries. Uganda pointed out that it may not be possible to objectively decide what is small-scale fisheries. Over time, will the small-scale sector still be considered small-scale?

Uganda also drew attention to the high levels of vulnerability and risk in the sector due to the spread of HIV/AIDS. It was pointed out that the labour force was being affected by HIV/AIDS, which, in turn, affected the transmission of traditional knowledge to the next generation, so essential for improving resource management.

Uganda further pointed out the problems arising from the fact that fishers are not well organized in a context where market forces (on the demand side) are increasingly organized.

Several States highlighted the initiatives they have taken to support the small-scale fisheries sector. The Philippines described its efforts to support decentralized community-based resources management through support for local government units (LGUs) and the establishment of fisheries and aquatic resources management committees (FARMCs). It was pointed out that these efforts have helped reduce poverty and increase food security.

Papua New Guinea outlined several measures adopted in support of small-scale fisheries such as the reform of domestic fisheries legislation, the involvement of small-scale fishers in decisionmaking, and the encouragement given to promoting partnerships between commercial and small-scale fisheries.

Mauritius highlighted some of its recent measures to support small-scale fisheries, such as setting up a special credit line for small-scale fisheries, setting up a special training school for fishers, and so on.

Chile described initiatives such as the establishment of a fund for promoting small-scale fisheries, the emphasis on a gender approach in fisheries, establishment of management areas, catch quotas for small-scale fishers for demersal and coastal species, special credit line for small-scale fisheries, and support for new markets for catch from small-scale fisheries. Guatamela highlighted the provision of credit for the small-scale fisheries sector.

Peru pointed out that its national strategy for poverty reduction also had a focus on the small-scale fisheries sector. Measures to support small-scale fisheries include the demarcation of a five-mile inshore zone reserved exclusively for artisanal and small-scale fisheries.

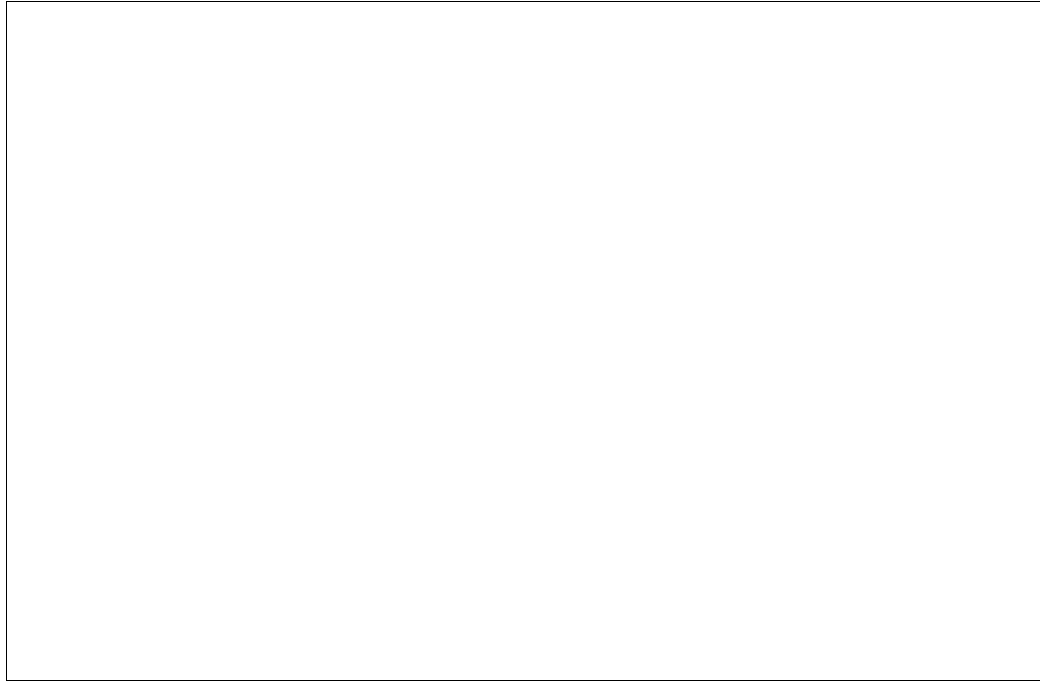
Recognizing the important role of women in the fisheries sector, particularly in the post-harvest sector, Brazil mentioned a recent meeting organized on gender and equity in the fisheries sector. Brazil also stressed the importance of preferential access rights for small-scale fishers, and referred to the extractive marine reserves being set up by the government, where such rights were protected.

Ghana spoke of some of its initiatives to support the small-scale fisheries sector, such as the formation of beach management committees and the representation of small-scale fishers in the fishers' commission.

Guinea Conakry mentioned the encouragement and support for community-based monitoring and surveillance. In some communities, fishers are monitoring the adjacent inshore waters to ensure that no trawling takes place there. Guinea Conakry stressed that these efforts need to be extended to other communities and areas as well. Two documentaries on this initiative have been prepared as well.

#### **Support given**

Several west African States spoke positively of the projects of the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) that support the small-scale fisheries sector. Ivory Coast mentioned the support being given by the International Fund for Agricultural



Development (IFAD) to the small-scale fisheries sector, while Gambia spoke of the support that has come from the European Union (EU) and Japan.

The high degree of participation from Member States in the discussion on this Agenda Item was a clear indication of the importance now accorded to small-scale fisheries, which was reiterated by calls for an enabling environment to support the sector.

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