

Path to a Policy Upgrade

Incorporating the SSF Guidelines into the national fisheries policy requires several rounds of engagement with state and community stakeholders

The onset of the new millennium saw the process of fisheries development taking a new path globally. It's one with a strong emphasis on offshore and deep-sea fishing, fish exports and the increased use of oceans for tourism and other development activities, indicating a rising dependence on blue economic growth. These processes remain weakly regulated or unregulated; they

functions of providing employment, nutrition and food security to coastal populations.

The implementation process

Between July 2018 and August 2019, SLFSSF embarked on a process to implement the SSF Guidelines, with assistance from the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), as part of FAO efforts towards the global implementation of the SSF Guidelines. The plan of activities included sensitizing the state actors (from diverse institutions in the coastal zone) to the nuances of the guidelines; developing communication tools for community stakeholders; conducting stakeholder consultation workshops covering several parts of the country; assessing current policy; and remodelling it by incorporating the relevant parts of the guidelines.

Community representatives

The participants at these workshops included fisher community representatives (including women fisherfolk), state actors representing diverse government departments operating in the coastal zone, and policy experts. The active participation of fisheries officials at the stakeholder consultation workshops was a key feature of the island-wide consultations. This resulted in a group of policy experts creating an SSF policy document (SSF Policy 2019), taking into account a number of thematic areas that formed the missing links in the fisheries policy as it existed in 2018. This was discussed and finalized at a policy workshop held in June 2019, attended by the Secretary of the Ministry of Fisheries, who made the keynote address. It was expected that the current national fisheries policy would be remodelled taking into account the new policy guidelines.

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marginalize the artisanal and small-scale fisheries (SSF) sector rooted in vulnerable communities severely hit by poverty and displacement.

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines), adopted in 2014 at the meeting of the Committee on Fisheries of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), came as a panacea for the protection of the rights of small-scale fishers. In an effort to implement the SSF Guidelines, the Sri Lanka Forum for Small-Scale Fisheries (SLFSSF) embarked on an island-wide consultation process in 2018-2019, leading to the formation of a small-scale fisheries policy that has incorporated a number of policy strategies to protect the rights of small-scale fishers. Now it is up to the government of Sri Lanka to adopt them, to see that the small-scale fisheries sector is protected and would continue to perform its age-old

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The state actor sensitizing workshop held in Colombo 28th September 2018. The major outcome was the Ministry of Fisheries agreeing to initiate discussions in incorporating the SSF Policy 2019 into the national fisheries policy of 2018

Addressing existing voids

A number of missing links in the National Fisheries Policy of 2018 were noticed in thematic areas, such as tenure rights, sustainable resource management, post-harvest and trade, occupational health and safety, social protection and insurance, gender equality, disaster risk and climate change, social development, capacity development and empowering community organizations. The SSF Guidelines implementation process addressed all these missing links, and policy strategies were prepared based on the island-wide consultations carried out in 12 of the 15 coastal districts.

In the SSF Policy 2019, the emphasis laid on the need to look at the coastal ecosystem as a whole in management decision making was an important step forward. This was associated with the need for cross-sectoral collaboration and institutional coordination and the need to establish co-management platforms at the local level, rising up to the national level. Emphasis was laid on the incorporation of four important features into co-management platforms

to make them integrated, inclusive, participatory and holistic. The need for capacity building of both state and community stakeholders for effective participation in such platforms was also underlined. A related proposition was the need to empower community organizations, consulting them at all stages of development activities and obtaining their active participation in management decisions. Several policy statements were also incorporated to protect the legitimate tenure rights of fishers to land, water and fish resources, as well as their rights to the demarcation of boundaries in the coastal zone.

The SSF Policy 2019 also laid down a number of strategies on social protection, work conditions and fisheries insurance. The need to revise and improve the fishermen's pension scheme, adopting the relevant ILO conventions on work in the fishing sector, reducing discrepancy in the wages paid for men and women, and establishing a fisheries insurance scheme jointly with fisheries cooperatives to minimize informational asymmetries, are important

improvements over the current policy. Gender is another area that got increased attention in the new policy; it was also proposed, among other things, that women's representation in the committees of community organizations should be a minimum of 25 per cent. Appreciably, the need for government intervention in marketing and trade, to cope with unfair producer prices, unfair trade and nutrition issues, was also highlighted.

Negotiations with the government

Political turmoil in late 2019, and the period through the first round of COVID-19 (from March until the parliamentary elections in July) saw a long period of 'governance failure', wherein the administrative system remained very weak and 'regressive'.

Pre-conditions for 'take-off'

Successful implementation of the proposed SSF Guidelines depends on certain important pre-conditions. These will ensure the policy is properly translated into community deliverables. They are:

Awareness building: In general, the governors see fishing as 'catching fish to earn an income'. They have poor knowledge of fishing communities, the issues confronted by them in their day-to-day life, social-development needs, social security protection, levels of poverty and threats posed to them by other coastal resource users and climate change, among other things. No efforts or investments have gone into studying fishing communities since the last census of fisheries was carried out in 1972. Which is why a national seminar is in the works, aimed at 'understanding fisheries and fishing communities'; this could be an 'awareness-building' workshop, especially aimed at state officers and parties interested in, and working towards, securing sustainable SSF. This timely and apt move could be held in 2022, the year devoted to artisanal and small-scale fisheries.

Assist the government to prepare an action plan: Past experience shows that action plans are often prepared without being guided by policy. In fact, in the absence of any national policy, past actions plans were prepared in an ad hoc manner. This age-old practice cannot continue in the presence of a national policy. As a maiden effort in preparing socially optimal action plans, the new SSF Policy 2019 could accompany an action plan based on information obtained from extensive stakeholder consultations, including an array of activities proposed by the fishing communities and state actors, scrutinized and improved with the participation of experienced policy and planning experts, academics, researchers and civil society organizations.

Integrated and collaborative platforms: The coastal zone resources are also used by other stakeholders like those in tourism, industries, agriculture, wildlife, forests, and so on. Unfortunately, mandates of various institutions differ and there are huge mismatches among them. This often

66
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The fisheries sector was no exception and the only function of the Ministry of Fisheries was to ensure that fishing, fish landing and distribution continued uninterrupted.

Now that the country has established an effective governance system, the SLFSSF is initiating a process of negotiating with the government with the aim of incorporating the SSF Policy 2019 into the national fisheries policy of 2018. The SLFSSF is strongly supported in this by the National Science Foundation (NSF) of Sri Lanka, which has requested the Ministry of Fisheries to consider the SSF Policy 2019 for improving the national policy. The government's response has been positive and a change in the current national policy seems possible in the near future; it will go a long way in securing a sustainable small-scale fisheries sub-sector. Unfortunately, the second wave of COVID-19 devastated Sri Lanka, delaying the proposed discussions; they are expected to commence once the pandemic subsides.

leads to friction among parties who operate in the same arena. The new Coastal Zone and Coastal Resource Management Plan of 2018 intends to manage the coastal zone through a Special Area Management (SAM) process, a model that has produced fruitful results in certain areas in the past, for example, in Rekawa. SAM is a typical example of integrated, participatory and holistic management. Thus, it is necessary now to ensure that fisheries interests are well represented in SAM. This necessitates the establishment of Fisheries Management Areas, as laid down in Article 31 (1) of the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act of 1996, and Fisheries Committees, under Article 31 (2) of the same. The representatives of Fisheries Committees could participate in Integrated Coastal Resource Management (ICRM) platforms, such as SAM. This demands a strong commitment by the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

Sectoral integration and institutional coordination: The need for cross-sectoral collaboration and institutional coordination in managing the coastal zone resource use is also an important concern. Co-management efforts will not succeed unless discrepancies among the mandates of different institutions are minimized. Therefore, it is proposed that the state intervenes to minimize overlapping policies and mandates among institutions responsible for coastal resources development, conservation and management. Even the planned SAM process will not achieve the desired results if such institutional coordination does not take place and conflicts among mandates are not resolved. A related issue would be the promotion of demarcating the boundaries of ecosystems in the coastal zone, when boundaries of diverse subsystems—such as lagoons, mangroves, reserves and forests—are not clear and difficulties are encountered in managing coastal resources.

Training and capacity building: The effective implementation of a number of policy strategies needs building up the capacities of state officers as well as communities in a

number of disciplines. While there is much interest today in the sustainable use of resources, conservation and management, the fishing communities are hardly made aware of the diverse measures to be adopted to achieve the goals of sustainability. A sizeable void exists in the area of fisheries management, especially in the idea of co-management. Neither the state officers nor the communities fully understand what co-management means and how it leads to integrated, inclusive, participatory and holistic resource management in the coastal zone. Thus, all stakeholders in the coastal zone should be trained to actively participate in co-management platforms.

Empowering cooperatives: When it comes to performing the functions expected of a strong community organization, the fisheries cooperatives suffer from two problems at present: one, their weak role in resource management and, two, the presence of a parallel community structure, the Rural Fisheries Organizations (RFOs).

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Even though they have performed fairly well in meeting an array of the well-being aspirations of the fisherfolk, the cooperatives have failed tremendously in managing the fisheries resources, especially in controlling entry. On the other hand, the RFOs remained outside the mainstream of activities because they commanded no faith or trust among the people and did not enjoy a dominant status among fishers. This was the opposite case with the fisheries co-operatives that had won the faith of communities with, for example, transparency in financial matters, auditing of accounts, open membership for all (including women), provision of livelihood capital, equal treatment to all, organization of collective activities, high social cohesion and protecting the rights of fishing communities.

Therefore, fisheries cooperatives need to be empowered, to represent fisher interests at Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) platforms and also to take the leading role in ICZM as the representative of the dominant stakeholder group.

Social security protection: A serious drawback in the government involvement in social security and social welfare in Sri Lanka's fisheries sector has been its inability to offer an effective pension scheme to fishers, the only 'safety net' that aimed at providing protection to SSF. Apart from the structural inefficiencies, the basic problem was the non-viability of the scheme, which depended heavily on government funds. The Ministry of Fisheries has to revisit the scheme, identify the reasons for its failure and attempt to revitalize it with the required institutional co-ordination, in consultation with social security experts. Fisheries insurance has always remained ineffective due to the inherent—and colossal—informational issues. One of the effective means of minimizing information asymmetries is to link insurance schemes with fisheries co-operatives that possess near-perfect knowledge of what happens at sea. This necessitates a close dialogue among the Department of Fisheries, insurance companies and fisheries cooperatives.

Conclusion

The process of implementation of the SSF Guidelines in Sri Lanka has been quite successful in making significant progress on the policy front. The major output of the process was the preparation of a small-scale fisheries policy that has incorporated several guidelines missed out in the current policy, while the major outcome was the Ministry of Fisheries agreeing to initiate discussions in incorporating the SSF Policy 2019 into the national fisheries policy of 2018. The success of the process could be attributed to the active participation of the government actors throughout, the successful conduct of island-wide stakeholder consultations and the ability of the project staff to explain the SSF Guidelines to the diverse stakeholders in their own language in very simple terms.

The expected benefits of this exercise, however, depend not only on the successful incorporation of the relevant guidelines into the national policy but also on ensuring that the process will finally benefit the small-scale fishers. This requires several rounds of engagement in preparing the people and the environment. The essentials and the deliverables remain constant: training and awareness and capacity building of state and community stakeholders; sectoral integration and institutional coordination; empowerment of community organizations; and assistance from the government to prepare action plans, based on policy guidelines. 3

For more

FAO - ICSF's Project: National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and legislation integrates key elements of the SSF Guidelines

<https://igssf.icsf.net/en/page/1088-Sri%20Lanka.html>

Sri Lanka: Aiming for Holistic Management

<https://www.icsf.net/en/samudra/article/EN/80-4368-Aiming-for-Holi.html>

SSF Guidelines: Action Stations

<https://www.icsf.net/en/samudra/article/EN/82-4407-Action-Stations.html>

Co-operatives: Wellbeing Aspirations

<https://www.icsf.net/en/samudra/article/EN/79-4352-Wellbeing-Aspir.html>

The national fisheries and aquaculture policy: Changes proposed to the current fisheries policy, 'to incorporate relevant FAO Voluntary Guidelines for securing sustainable small scale fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication'

https://igssf.icsf.net/images/ICSF_FAO%20PROJECT1/SL%20010_Changes%20proposed%20to%20the%20National%20Fisheries%20Policy.pdf