

International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)
IYAFA 2022: Asia Workshop -Celebrating Sustainable and Equitable Small-scale Fisheries

PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questions aim to identify key issues for small-scale fishers and fishworkers in Asia in line with the Small-scale Fisheries Guidelines and the objectives of the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA) 2022. The questions cover the environmental, economic, and social aspects of small-scale fisheries, with particular emphasis on strengthening governance and organizations. The thematic areas identified by participants will guide the development of the workshop agenda.

Response by: Herman Wijethunge, National Convener, National Fisheries Solidarity Organization (NAFSO), Srilanka

Personal Experience

1) How are you linked to small-scale fisheries in your country? Can you describe the major characteristics of the sector.

I have been working with SSF communities since 1997, organizing, mobilizing and building movement of fish workers, fisherwomen and youth in fishing communities. My organization is affiliated with a number of local, regional, national and international organizations which work with fishing communities.

Sri Lanka's coastline stretches for 1153 km. We have over 40 lagoons, and more than 4000 fishing villages (both inland and coastal). There is an anchorage point in each village. We have small scale non-mechanized boats, wooden boats, FRP boats and around 4000 multi-day fishing vessels. Beach seine operations also contribute to the fish catch. We have a rich mangrove forest cover. Development activities like industrial agriculture have hurt the cover.

2) What makes you proud to be involved with small-scale fisheries?

At NAFSO we have been able to amplify the community's voice. We have organized fishers, women and youth within the sector—we consider this as an achievement.

Environmental Sustainability

1) Do you think that some of your fishing practices are sometimes detrimental to fisheries resources and the environment(e.g.aquatic species, flood plains, mangroves)? If yes, how?

Yes, fishers use some techniques which are harmful to sustenance of fishing grounds, coral reefs, sea weeds and coastal ecosystems. Dynamiting, light purse seine nets, bottom trawling are a few among many practices damaging natural resources.

2) Have you been involved in conserving or managing (marine or inland) fisheries resources? Are there any lessons that you would like to share?

Yes, we engage in sustainable use of resources. We promote co-management practices, push government authorities and enforce the law. We do this via legal measures, registering court cases, people's mediations, introducing some management practices.

Economic Viability

1) What challenges do small-scale fishers face in getting boats, gear and engines in your country? How do they deal with these challenges?

Cost of boats, gear and engines are have risen because of general inflation. Because the country imports a lot of this material, prices are rising regularly. Fishers have no way to deal with this. It is beyond their control. However, women in the community secure loans and attempt to support their families with their savings.

2) What challenges do small-scale fishers and fishworkers face in accessing local/regional/international markets (e.g.competition from sellers, infrastructural issues,poor access to loans)?Do they receive any support (e.g. from the government) to facilitate access to these markets?

SSF produce is mainly for domestic consumption. Whatever is exported faces lots of competition from export dealers. In addition, small-scale fishers are exploited by middlemen. . There is no serious effort from the government to assist the SSF in tackling this.

3) Do you think the income generated from small-scale fisheries is adequate to meet small-scale fishers and fishworkers' basic needs?

No. Fuel prices, poor marketing and low income means SSFs barely survive and cover their basic needs. On most days, fishers' income can't cover their fuel costs. They are often indebted to middlemen. Many fishers claim to not be in a position to continue working, and leave the sector to work as fish workers in multi-day fishing vessels.

Social Sustainability

1) What are the main government programmes available in your country for addressing poverty and improving the standard of living of fishing communities (e.g. education, health insurance, pension scheme, housing, sanitation)? What are the barriers to accessing such programmes?

Government has introduced a so called pension scheme. It is not functioning well. Although the officials collect pension installments regularly there is a lot of corruption in the system.

Fishers blindly pay the monthly installment to the officials but haven't received anything in return.

- 2) What are the most common fisher and fishworker organizations in your country (e.g. trade unions, co-operatives, community-based organizations)?**

Co-operatives and CBOs are the most common though few Trade Unions also exist

- 3) Are many fishers and fishworkers members of these organizations? Are women active in these organizations? How do these organizations help fishers and fishworkers improve their lives and livelihoods?**

Women are more active than men in CBOs. Men dominate the fisheries co-operatives. CBOs are run by members and provide saving schemes, loan assistance and assistance for IGP activities. Women acquire loans from them and pay lower rates of interests than at banks or micro finance agencies. In this way, fish workers improve their livelihoods and survive without too much debt.

Governance

- 1) Do fishers and fishworkers in your country have rights to fishing grounds granted by the government? Do they have traditional rights? Are their human rights protected?**

There are some Special Area Management programmes (SAM). SSFs do not exclusively declared areas of access. In some places, like the Negombo lagoon, SSFs get fishing rights for their fishing grounds for stake and net fisheries. On the coasts, grounds are allocated through a license for beach seine operations.

- 2) What government legislation and policies are relevant to small-scale fisheries in your country (e.g. both inland and marine)? Are they developed in consultation with fishing communities? Is there an official definition of small-scale fisheries?**

The main legislation on fisheries management is the Fisheries Management Act no 2 of 199. It was adopted without any consultation with fishers.

- 3) Have you heard of the *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication* (SSF Guidelines)? If yes, how can the SSF Guidelines improve your well-being?**

Yes, we have heard about the SSF Guidelines. The guidelines are framed considering human rights. They account for small-scale fishers and ensure they can have decent life. Furthermore they recognize women in fisheries and call for more participation in decision making. Overall, they are based on principles that will strengthen small-scale fishers' dignity and wellbeing.

Gender Equality and Equity

- 1) **What are the major challenges faced by women in fisheries in terms of access to resources, markets and participation in fisher and fishworker organizations in your country?**

Historically women are excluded from cooperatives which are the main organizing body within fishing communities. Nonmembers cannot own fishing gear which is again a deterrent. Women have a legal right to engage in fish harvesting activities.

- 2) **Are there laws or policies that benefit or protect the rights of women in fisheries?**

Although there is no direct policy aiming at fisher women, civil society organizations emphasize the CEDAW as the frame work to demand rights for women. Women's organizations approach the National women committee for any issues.

- 3) **What are the major programmes, policies, initiatives or organizations that help to improve the visibility and participation of women in the fisheries sector?**

There are almost no such initiatives in the country. Recently, NAFSO facilitated the creation of a group called the National Women Fisheries Federation. Each province has a provincial body that helps voice women's issues. In the northern and eastern provinces, women's organizations focus on issues in households headed by women. These include the effects of war, and the issue of displacement.

Food Security and Nutrition

- 1) **Is there any legislation or policy recognizing food security and nutrition as a human right in your country (e.g. right to food act, nutritional guidelines)?**

This is an area we need to further study before we can respond.

- 2) **How do small-scale fisheries contribute to local food security and nutrition?**

SSFs produce 80 per cent of fish for local. They are the major contributor to domestic nutrition. Deep sea fisheries are aimed at exports and therefore not focused on local food security. SSFs contribute majorly towards the protein supply of the country.

- 3) **Are there similarities between fishing and farming communities in your country (e.g. in terms of challenges, opportunities, culture, social organization)?**

Yes, fishers and farmers face many of the same problems. Input prices are high and unaffordable for small farmers and small-scale fishers. They are exploited by middlemen. There are very few policies that cater to their needs and during the pandemic both groups face huge problems selling their produce.

Resilience

- 1) **What kind of changes did the COVID-19 pandemic cause in small-scale fisheries in your country? How did fishers and fishworkers respond to these changes? Did**

they receive any support from the government or other organizations during the pandemic?

The major problem was selling fish. No fish vendors approached SSFs during the pandemic. Fisher women also faced trouble selling post harvest products like dry fish. Furthermore they was no support from the government to help people survive and acquire basic necessities. NGOs supported fishers, providing them dry rations.

2) What are the major threats fishers and fishworkers face and what are their impacts? These may include environmental threats (e.g.cyclones, typhoons, coastal erosion and degradation) and other threats (e.g. eviction, aquaculture development, sand mining,river diversion, land reclamation, infrastructure development, industrial activities, pollution).

Sea erosion, cyclones, floods, sea gales, and coastal degradation are constant along the coasts of the country. In addition development projects like large scale tourism, creation of special economic zones and aquaculture has displaced coastal communities and destroyed the environment. Coastal pollution is a severe threat. Three cargo ships were destroyed in Sri Lankan waters in 2020-21. In the northern province, coastal destruction is happening because of bottom trawling by local fishers and Indian trawlers.

3) How are fishers and fishworkers adapting to or responding to the above threats (e.g. through advocacy, impact assessments, early warning systems, life-saving equipment, insurance schemes)?

Fishers attempt to overcome these issues through collective action. They do so with advocacy campaigns, extensive lobbying as well as pursuing issues via legislation. The support of the media is crucial and their coverage of fishers' problems helps in gathering support from society.

Are there any other national, regional, or international issues relevant to small-scale fisheries that the workshop should address?

