

A Climate of Adaptation

Adaptive social protection and effective fisheries management can be the best approach to move towards climate-resilient fisheries

Livelihoods and jobs based on small-scale fisheries are the most vulnerable to climate-driven changes in marine resources and ecosystem services, observes the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report 2022 (SAR 2022). They would, as a result, face the risk of reduced ability to provide food security and social well-being. It is pertinent, therefore, to reduce this vulnerability through responsive early warning systems, improved sea safety, better adaptation measures, secure access to fishing grounds and effective fisheries management. In this backdrop, the Early Warnings to All Initiative by 2027 of the United Nations needs to be upheld by all stakeholders, and fishing communities are to be brought under its coverage.

In the context of mainstreaming climate change adaptation in fisheries strategies and plans, data and information are to be generated to identify areas, fishing grounds and fishing activities most—and least—vulnerable to climate-change impacts. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) needs to undertake this task. Such databases, periodically updated, can lead to the development of suitable adaptation measures for different categories of small-scale, artisanal and Indigenous fisheries without too much loss and damage.

Resilience-building measures, for example, could include investing, with the help of climate finance, in fishing capacity and sea safety of some fishers to access new fishing grounds to deal with slow-onset disasters such as flooding and shift in fishery resources to new latitudes. They could involve investing in taking some other fishers completely out of their traditional fishing grounds due to safety concerns, and providing them with alternative sources of livelihoods. They

could also include investing in adapting traditional ecological and local knowledge to new contexts.

Further, to cushion the adverse effects of climate change on poverty eradication and livelihoods, as recognized in the Outcome of the First Global Stocktake of the 28th Conference of the Parties, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Dubai, 2023, the use of ‘adaptive social protection measures for all’ needs to be promoted and mainstreamed in fisheries. Climate finance portfolios may include support to developing such

measures in consultation with affected communities. FAO may document such uses of climate finance.

Adaptive social protection is defined by SAR 2022 as a resilience-building approach to eliminate extremes and slow-onset climate events like sea-level rise. It combines elements of social protection, disaster risk reduction and climate-change adaptation, and includes: cash transfers under social assistance and social insurance, labour market policies such as unemployment benefits, and livelihood development measures such as income diversification and livelihood shift strategies, weather index insurance, housing subsidies, sea-safety measures, and post-disaster construction.

As a safety net to deal with climate-change impacts and the protection of livelihoods, especially of those in the frontline facing extreme and slow-onset disasters, there needs to be a concerted effort to bring adaptive social protection to small-scale fishing communities across the world. Needless to say, this has to be undertaken in a gender-responsive manner and by applying a human-rights-based approach. A combination of adaptive social protection and effective fisheries management can be the best approach to move towards climate-resilient fisheries and fishing communities. 

