

NGO STATEMENT

26th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), 8 March 2005

AGENDA ITEM 5: Assistance to the fishing communities affected by the tsunami in the Indian Ocean and measures to rehabilitate and reactivate the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the countries concerned

We are representatives of organizations working with, and concerned about, small-scale and artisanal fishing communities in countries affected by the tsunami in Asia and Africa—fishing communities that engage in beach-based operations using labour-intensive techniques, that live in marginalized socio-economic conditions and that depend on the coast for their survival.

The response by local, national and international organizations to the tragic events of 26 December has been spontaneous and generous. We stress, however, the importance of a clear policy framework within which aid is delivered, in a context where many private players and organizations are running large scale relief and rehabilitation operations. We, therefore, urge the FAO and Member States to ensure that all rehabilitation and aid is delivered within a clear policy framework that includes the following elements:

- All rehabilitation strategies should employ people-centred and participatory approaches, taking cognizance of the work that has already been taken up by NGOs and fishworker organizations. Fishing communities and fishworker organizations should be directly involved in the design and implementation of rehabilitation interventions.
- Relief and rehabilitation should be recognized as a right of affected populations, and should be delivered on a humanitarian basis, irrespective of gender, legal status, ethnicity etc, and with a particular focus on vulnerable groups.
- Post-tsunami rehabilitation of the fisheries sector must be within the framework of sustainable and responsible fisheries, and should promote "employment-intensive" fisheries operations that contribute directly to poverty alleviation and food security.
- The right of fishing communities to occupy coastal lands traditionally inhabited by them must be recognized and protected. Where safety considerations require the rehabilitation of communities, this should be in consultation with them and with their prior informed consent. Land identified for rehabilitation should be close enough to the sea, to maintain the organic link with their livelihoods. Legal measures should be adopted to ensure that the priority use rights to coastal and beach spaces continue to rest with fishing communities, and that vacated coastal lands are not taken over by tourist, aquaculture, housing/real estate and other industrial interests.
- Compensation packages for the mechanized fleet should be suitably designed to ensure that the problems of overfishing and social conflict that their operations were causing in the pre-tsunami period, including in waters of neighbouring countries, are eliminated.
- Transfer of fishing vessels, or rather the subsidized transfer of overcapacity from the North to tsunami-affected countries, should be stopped. There can be no doubt that these vessels have been designed for completely different conditions and labour requirements. Such transfers, apart from potentially creating problems of overcapacity in tsunami-affected regions, will

also hinder the development of local capacity for production of vessels, displacing local people of an important source of employment and livelihood.

- In the case of artisanal and small-scale fisheries, interventions should be designed with care to ensure that the stock of craft, motors and gear are not increased beyond the pre-tsunami levels and that harmful fishing gears and methods are not promoted. Creation of overcapacity in the artisanal sector in the name of ‘development’ and ‘upgradation’ needs to be avoided. Social engineering of the artisanal sector, disrupting current patterns of ownership and organization of production by well-intentioned outsiders, is another danger to guard against.
- There has been a great emphasis on aquaculture as a livelihood option for rehabilitation in the post-tsunami period. The social, environmental and livelihood problems created by intensive and industrial forms of shrimp aquaculture in the region in the pre-tsunami period are well known and it is imperative that such operations should not be resumed, till all concerns of environmental and social sustainability are suitably addressed. In this context, proposals to use lands that have been salinized by the recent tsunami for purposes of shrimp aquaculture —lands that in most cases have been under paddy cultivation—should be rejected.
- There are also proposals to encourage other forms of aquaculture, including mariculture, as a rehabilitation option. It is essential to ensure that this does not lead to social and environmental problems, particularly through ‘privatization’ of inshore waters and the consequent disruption of fishing operations and livelihoods.
- Strategies for the rehabilitation of the post-harvest sector, a sector that provides a significant source of livelihood for women of fishing communities, should emphasize on use and dissemination of employment-intensive, locally appropriate, low-cost and hygienic technologies.
- The process of providing assistance should directly contribute to strengthening and empowering community organizations. It should not leave communities more vulnerable and conflict-ridden.
- Clear and independent mechanisms to monitor the use of financial assistance for relief and rehabilitation should be set up. Audited statements of account for all aid, whether received by governments or NGOs/ private agencies, in the name of tsunami victims, should be made available to the general public in the interests of transparency.
- It is essential to set up autonomous, independent agencies, at various levels, for disaster prevention, preparedness and management. It is as essential to link these to community-based disaster preparedness systems and to civil society initiatives. There should be particular focus on preventive measures, such as creation of natural shelterbelts through planting and protection of mangroves and other appropriate species

Once again, we urge the FAO and Member States to ensure a policy framework that takes into account the above issues in designing and implementing post-tsunami interventions for rehabilitation of fisheries-based livelihoods.

Signed by:

World Forum of Fisherpeoples (WFFP)

World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF)

South Indian Federation of Fishermen's Societies (SIFFS), India

National Fishworkers Forum, India

Southern Fisherfolk Federation, Thailand

The Collaborative Network for the Rehabilitation of Andaman Communities and Natural Resources, Thailand

The Coalition Network for Andaman Coastal Community Support, (Save Andaman Network) Thailand

National Fisheries Solidarity (NAFSO), Sri Lanka

JALA, Advocacy Network for North Sumatra Fisherfolk, Indonesia

International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)

Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA)

Greenpeace International

Birdlife International

World Wide Fund for Nature (International)

World Conservation Trust