

Focus on the Small-scale Sector

Social issues in small-scale fisheries were discussed at the recent session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the FAO

For the third time in succession, small-scale fisheries was on the agenda of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), during its 27th Session, which took place during 5-9 March in Rome, Italy.

The background paper for Agenda Item 8 on "Social Issues in Small-scale

be taken to contribute to the social and economic development of small-scale fishing communities. COFI was also invited to comment on the Strategy for Action outlined, and recommend specific social development measures relating, *inter alia*, to:

- a legal framework that ensures access to justice for all individuals and groups within fishing communities;
- policies allowing for non-discriminatory, secure access to, and utilization of, resources important to small-scale fishing communities;
- assurance of access to natural resources and social sector support services by women and vulnerable, marginalized and traditionally disadvantaged groups, including migrant workers, indigenous peoples, and displaced persons in fishing communities;
- legal provisions for representation in local decision-making processes by women and other vulnerable groups in fishing communities to allow them to participate fully and equitably in the economy; and
- social protection measures such as direct cash transfers to the poorest and other safety-net measures such as post-disaster food aid.

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Fisheries" stressed that more attention needs to be given to the subject, particularly since poverty, vulnerability and low levels of social development compromise the ability of small-scale fishers to adopt responsible fishing practices and participate in co-management and community-based fisheries management regimes. It stressed that social development issues can be addressed through various sectoral policies relating to education, health, social insurance and others, and that a human-rights perspective, widely adopted in the United Nations system, provides an overarching approach to addressing social development.

COFI was invited to guide Member Nations, FAO and other agencies on the kind of policies and measures, including the use of a rights-based approach to fisheries management, that could

Fishers' organization

The discussion on Agenda Item 8 opened with a Statement (see Box 1) from the two organizations of small-scale fisher people present at COFI, namely, the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) and the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF). The Statement, welcoming the

BOX 1

Statement from WFF and WFFP

Agenda Item 8: Social Issues in Small-scale Fisheries

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

One billion people around the world depend on fish as their primary protein source. Artisanal and small-scale fisher organizations and their supporters have, for more than two decades, argued for the recognition of the importance of social issues in the fisheries debate. We see the document presented here today as a very important step forward for us and for our communities.

Not only does the document thoroughly describe the social situation in many coastal fishery communities, it also convincingly argues that there is a strong link between the social situation and human rights and the management of natural resources.

We, the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF) and the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), gather artisanal and small-scale fisherfolk from more than 70 countries. The vast majority of the world's fishers belong to our subsector.

In several countries, fishers are among the poorest and most marginalized. This is because their rights to land and fish resources and to basic services such as education and health, among other things, are not recognized. It is also these factors

that prevent small-scale fisher people from fulfilling their potential role in contributing more significantly to local and national economies, to responsible fisheries and to food security.

Recognition of the situation from the FAO is valuable and welcome—but it does not change the situation. It is essential that policies on fisheries management, fisheries trade and coastal management are made consistent with the human-rights approach.

In our opinion, fisheries trade that compromises food security and local livelihoods, as well as ecolabelling schemes that lack a socioeconomic component, need to be revoked. Fisheries-management measures that lead to privatization of fisheries resources, denying access to small-scale fishers, including women fishers, and that lead to displacement of our communities from the coastal lands traditionally inhabited by them, also need to be revoked.

Our rights have to be recognised and respected by governments and by inter-governmental organizations like the World Trade Organization, within a framework of human rights and food sovereignty.

More than 10 years ago, the FAO adopted the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. In these years, the Code has become an important framework for the improvement of fisheries management.

The Code fully recognizes the crucial role that small-scale fishers and their communities play in this process.

However, the reality is that marginalized communities have little possibility to participate in management processes, and this participation will not come without broad social development. Legally defined rights are imperative for this development to be achieved.

We, therefore, urge the governments to take these recommendations to heart. Rejecting these recommendations is rejecting fisher people their right to a decent life, quality food and community heritage. It is also denying the social and economic contribution made by them and the opportunity to enhance it.

On our side, we, the fisher people of your countries, will continue our work to make these recommendations a reality.

Endorsed by

- International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)
- Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA)
- Seas at Risk
- Greenpeace International
- Redmanglar International

background paper, and urging governments to take the recommendations made seriously, was endorsed by five other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) present at COFI. The Statement urged that policies on fisheries management, fisheries trade and coastal management be made consistent with the human-rights approach.

The Agenda Item witnessed lengthy discussions, with interventions from about 50 States and three intergovernmental organizations. The importance of small-scale fisheries and the need to support it were widely stressed. Delegates drew attention to various

problems facing small-scale fisheries, including poverty, safety at sea, credit, housing, education, health and market access (limited, for example, by sanitary standards). They also outlined the policy, welfare and other measures they had taken to support small-scale fisheries in their countries. Several delegates from States in Africa, such as Mali and Ivory Coast, commended the role of the Sustainable Fisheries Livelihood Programme (SFLP) in supporting sustainable small-scale fisheries. (SFLP represents a partnership between the FAO, the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom

BOX 2

Agenda Item 8: Social issues in Small-scale Fisheries

Recommendations/Decisions

The Committee:

- * Agreed that policies and development programmes needed to be tailored to the specific needs in particular locations, countries and regions and types of small-scale fisheries that could range from occasional subsistence activities to year-round commercial operations targeting fish for export markets (para. 55).
- * Recognized that progress in the implementation of international human rights instruments including the conventions on the rights of seafarers and working conditions in fisheries were critical to both small-scale and large-scale fisheries and stressed that the recognition and adoption of human-rights principles can help achieve poverty eradication and facilitate the adoption of responsible fisheries practices (para. 58).
- * Expressed its support for the strategy of action as noted in paragraph 23 of COFI/2007/6 that brought together responsible fisheries and social development and stressed the need to adopt a rights-based approach to managing small-scale fisheries that respects the interests of present and future generations and ensures resource sustainability, reduces vulnerability and optimizes the flow of benefits to fishing communities and the wider economy (para. 59).
- * Highlighted the importance of disaster prevention and mitigation measures and safety-at-sea for reducing vulnerability of fishers and coastal communities (para. 60).
- * Took note of the strong support by many members to establish a dedicated COFI Sub-Committee and/or a specific programme of work on small-scale fisheries supported by dedicated extra-budgetary funding and agreed that the issue of small-scale fisheries was important and FAO should continue to work on this issue (para. 61).
- * Welcomed the proposal by Norway that FAO examine the convening of a broad-based international conference focusing specifically on small-scale fisheries of a format similar to the 1999 FishRights and 2006 Sharing the Fish Conferences (para. 62).

— from the draft advance copy of the *FAO Fisheries Report No. 830*

of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (DFID) and the 25 participating, developing countries of western Africa.)

Delegates stressed the need to foster fisher and fishing-community associations, and for co-management and capacity-building initiatives. Panama, speaking on behalf of States from Central America, highlighted the need to enhance budgets to support small-scale fisheries.

Thailand, welcoming the focus on small-scale fisheries, proposed an exclusive programme of work or a global initiative to support small-scale fisheries, as through Regional Fisheries Man-

subcommittee on small-scale fisheries, such as the ones for aquaculture and trade. Several States, particularly developing States, supported these proposals, including Algeria, Cameroon, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Maldives, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda and Vietnam..

Norway, supporting the NGO Statement and the focus on rights issues in small-scale fisheries, stressed that securing rights must be done with a view to securing rights of the poor, including through redistribution and facilitating better organization of fishers and processors. Norway proposed a broad-based conference with a large number of participants that would focus specifically on small-scale fisheries, along the lines of the FishRights Conference, 1999, and Sharing the Fish Conference 2006, to discuss fisheries management models appropriate for small-scale fisheries. Several States supported the Norwegian proposal for an international conference. Both Norway and Brazil emphasized the need to link the human-rights perspective with FAO's Right to Food Guidelines. Germa-

Germany, speaking on behalf of the European Union, noted that the emphasis in the background paper on human rights detracted substantially from the more fundamental issue—that of fostering more effective fisheries management

gement Organizations (RFMOS) working on small-scale fisheries. Several States proposed the creation of a COFI



FAO's Committee on Fisheries conducts periodic general reviews of fishery and aquaculture problems of an international character

ny, speaking on behalf of the European Union, noted that the emphasis in the background paper on human rights detracted substantially from the more fundamental issue—that of fostering more effective fisheries management. The main focus should be on developing an effective management systems based around rights, with the complementary goal being to promote respect for human rights. The document, said Germany, understated the potential of property rights and supporting institutions in delivering sustainable management for small-scale fisheries. Canada, commenting on the background paper, said that the focus should be on the application of rights-based approaches to small-scale fisheries and on developing appropriate governance systems. Iceland, noting open access as a key problem, called for the adoption of rights-based approaches to fisheries management.

The International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), supporting the NGO Statement, called on States to adopt ILO's proposed Work in Fishing Convention (which has since been adopted).

The Advance Copy of the Report of the 27th Session of COFI carries the recommendations/decisions on this agenda item (see Box 2). Notably, COFI agreed with Norway's proposal of convening a broad-based international conference focusing specifically on small-scale fisheries. ¶

For more



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