

ICSF-WFFP BRIEFING NOTE

FOR DELEGATES TO THE TWENTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF FAO'S COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES (COFI)

2 - 6 March 2009

Rome, Italy

AGENDA ITEM 9: TOWARDS SECURING SUSTAINABLE SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES: BRINGING TOGETHER RESPONSIBLE FISHERIES AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Global Conference on Small-Scale Fisheries (4SSF), co-organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Royal Government of Thailand from 13 to 17 October 2008 in Bangkok, Thailand, was the first initiative of its kind to be organized with small-scale fisheries as the central theme. Of particular significance was the focus on human rights in fisheries. The FAO Fisheries Department is to be commended for positively engaging with civil society organizations (CSOs) at an early stage in the preparation of this Conference. This positive engagement was reflected in the significant participation of fishworker organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and indigenous peoples in the Conference. CSOs see the COFI as key in maintaining the momentum established by the 4SSF and in taking forward the proposals from it.

What are the main demands of civil society on small-scale fisheries?

A Civil Society Preparatory Workshop was organized by the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), the International NGO/CSO Planning Committee (IPC), the Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF) and the Federation of Southern Fisherfolk (FSF), Thailand, prior to 4SSF.

The Statement from this workshop (the Bangkok Statement on Small-scale Fisheries) puts forward basic principles and proposes an agenda for action for policies governing small-scale fisheries at the global level. The Bangkok Statement contains the key demands of CSOs—fishworker and fishing community organizations, and support NGOs—to COFI. All CSOs, in particular fishworker organizations, are committed to being in contact with their governments for implementation of these demands at the national and international levels.

The Bangkok Statement on Small-scale Fisheries is the outcome of a process that presents the collective interests, concerns and aspirations of small-scale fishworkers from many regions. It builds on several preparatory processes, in particular, the Statement developed by the WFFP, and regional workshops organized by the ICSF and other organizations in Asia (Siem Reap, Cambodia, 2007), Eastern and Southern Africa (Zanzibar, Tanzania, 2008), and Latin America (Punta de Tralca, Chile, 2008).

<http://sites.google.com/site/smallscalefisheries/statement>

Why is it relevant to grant special consideration to small-scale fisheries?

Small-scale fisheries contribute over half of the world's marine and inland fish catch, nearly all of which is used for direct human consumption. They employ over 90 per cent of the world's fishers and support another approximately 84 million people employed in jobs associated with fish processing, distribution and marketing. At least half of the people employed in small-scale fisheries are women. In many developing countries, small-scale fisheries contribute directly to food and livelihood security, balanced nutrition, poverty reduction, and rural development.

Small-scale fisheries are known to be relatively more sustainable, given the diversity and seasonality of the gear employed, the minimal bycatch generated, and, as important, the lower levels of energy consumed per unit of fish output. Even though the sector is rapidly changing today, and is relatively more technology- and capital-intensive, it does still provide the model on which to sustain fisheries and fishery-dependent livelihoods into the future.

Small-scale fisheries is not only an economic activity but is also a culture and a way of life, with skills, knowledge, social norms and systems of internal governance passed down over generations.

In spite of their contribution to economic and social development, nutritional well-being and societal and cultural values, small-scale fishing communities often face precarious and vulnerable living and working conditions, due to a range of factors, including insecure rights to land and fishery resources, unfair and unsafe working conditions, and inadequate or absent health and educational services and social safety nets. Women fishworkers experience particular discrimination. If provided with the right kind of support, the small-scale fisheries sector has tremendous potential to significantly contribute to sustainable development and to the attainment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) dealing with eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and ensuring environmental sustainability.

What is the fundamental basis of the Bangkok Statement?

Central to the Bangkok Statement is the tenet that the human rights of fishing communities are indivisible and that securing political, civil, social, economic and cultural rights of fishing communities is fundamental to moving towards responsible and sustainable fisheries.

The recognition of these basic principles by States is critical to securing the full and effective participation of fishing communities in sustainable fisheries.

What are the elements of a human-rights approach in fisheries?

The Bangkok Statement expands on what a human-rights approach to fisheries and fishing communities means, from the perspective of small-scale fishworkers and their communities. It details the rights that small-scale fishworkers consider as important, including:

- rights of fishing communities and indigenous people to their cultural identities, dignity and traditional rights, and to recognition of their traditional and indigenous knowledge systems;
- rights of access of small-scale and indigenous fishing communities to territories, lands and waters on which they have traditionally depended for their life and livelihoods;
- preferential rights to fisheries resources under national jurisdiction;
- rights of fishing communities to use, restore, protect and manage local aquatic and coastal ecosystems;
- rights of communities to participate in fisheries and coastal management decisionmaking, ensuring their free, prior and informed consent to all management decisions;
- rights of women to participate fully in all aspects of small-scale fisheries, eliminating all forms of discrimination against them and securing their safety against sexual abuse;
- rights of women of fishing communities to fish resources for processing, trading, and food, particularly through protecting the diversified and decentralized nature of small-scale and indigenous fisheries;
- rights of women to fish markets, particularly through provision of credit, appropriate technology and infrastructure at landing sites and markets;
- rights of fishing communities to basic services such as safe drinking water, education, sanitation, health and HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment services;
- rights of all categories of workers in the fisheries, including self-employed workers and workers in the informal sector, to social security and safe and decent working and living conditions; and
- rights of fishing communities to information in appropriate and accessible forms.

Why is it important to adopt a human-rights approach in fisheries?

A human-rights approach in fisheries recognizes that development efforts in fisheries should contribute to securing the freedom, well-being and dignity of all fisher people everywhere. Given the international consensus on achieving human rights, committed action to realizing the human rights of fishing communities, as indeed of all vital, yet marginalized groups and communities, is an obligation. The adoption of a human-rights approach has an intrinsic rationale as achieving human rights of all citizens is an end in itself. Adopting this approach also has an instrumental rationale in that it is likely to lead to better and more sustainable human development outcomes.



2005 World Summit Outcome: Sixtieth Session of UN General Assembly

“We resolve to integrate the promotion and protection of human rights into national policies and to support the further mainstreaming of human rights throughout the United Nations system, as well as closer co-operation between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and all relevant United Nations bodies.”

- Para 126, 2005 World Summit Outcome, Resolution No.60/1, Adopted by the Sixtieth Session of the United Nations General Assembly

What should COFI do?

The COFI should explicitly recognize the need to bring in a human-rights approach to its relevant deliberations and decisions. Further, it should recognize that fisheries line agencies have the responsibility of ensuring that all policies adopted within fisheries, whether related to fisheries management or the post-harvest sector, should be consistent with a human-rights approach. Moreover, fisheries line agencies should work with other agencies and organizations to seek improvement in the quality of life of fishing communities and to secure their rights.

Further, the call to COFI in the Bangkok Statement to include a specific chapter in the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) on small-scale fisheries, should be seriously heeded to by COFI, considering that while several of the provisions of the CCRF are supportive of small-scale fisheries and their social development, a Chapter on small-scale fisheries in the Code would serve to:

- strengthen the Code itself and enable the tremendous potential of the small-scale sector to contribute to food security, sustainable development and poverty alleviation, to be realized;
- provide guidance to national governments and donors on ways to maximize the potential of the small-scale fisheries sector within a responsible and sustainable fisheries framework; and
- enable small-scale fishing communities and their organizations to seek appropriate support from their governments.

Following the discussions and decisions at COFI, States should engage with fishing community and fishworker organization and NGOs at the national level, for developing appropriate programmes, policy and legislation.

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Side Event

For a discussion on the above issues, you are invited to a Side Event

Date: Wednesday, 4 March 2009

Venue: Iran Room, FAO Building, Rome

Time: 1300 to 1430 hrs

