



Case study:

Establishing pioneer Fisheries Associations in Vietnamese fishing communities



Overview

The Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (RFLP) has worked with the Department of Fisheries to improve the co-management process in Central Vietnam through the establishment of local Fisheries Associations in Quang Tri and Quang Nam provinces. In all, 14 Fisheries Associations were formed through which resource management as well as community livelihoods actions took place. This process highlighted the need for co-management activities to be part of an ongoing process to which all levels of government are committed.

Key lessons learned

- Government dominance of Fisheries Association management boards needs to be overcome. To do so trust with communities must be built.
- The capacity, confidence and organizational skills of Fisheries Associations can be built by allowing them to carry out community events and handle small amounts of funds.
- The role and relevance of Fisheries Associations can be boosted by making involvement in livelihoods or other activities dependent upon membership.
- Proactive efforts need to be made to ensure the participation of women.



Quang Tri fishing boat

Context

With the large number of small-scale fishers in the central provinces of Viet Nam, the management of capture fisheries faces considerable challenges. Limited financial and human resources of local management agencies has resulted in *de facto* open access in the inshore¹ waters of Viet Nam. The identification of an effective and viable capture fisheries management system is a priority, not only for the resource management agencies, but also for local fishers who rely heavily on inshore fisheries for their livelihoods.

The issues

Quang Tri and Quang Nam are two coastal provinces in Central Viet Nam. These coastal communities are poor, and have high dependence on capture fisheries, which have seen drastic declines in catch per unit effort (CPUE) in recent years. Currently the annual provincial catch is about 18,000 tons for Quang Tri, and more than 50,000 tons for Quang Nam.

Before RFLP support commenced in 2010, Quang Tri had no Provincial Fisheries Association or any Fisheries Associations for inshore fishers in coastal communes. While the Quang Nam Provincial

Fisheries Association was established in 2007, it performed almost no functions.

The initiative

Fisheries co-management can be defined as *the sharing of management responsibilities between local resource users (fishers) and the authorities*, and it has been widely recognized as an effective approach for aquatic resource management. The Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (RFLP) supported the Department of Fisheries in the establishment of local Fisheries Associations, with the aim of improving the co-management process in Central Vietnam. Fisheries Associations (FA) can play a pivotal role in mobilizing fishers, representing their interests, and working with the local government authorities as partners in fisheries resources management.

The co-management process in four key steps

1. Establishing the Fisheries Associations and building their capacity

RFLP in Viet Nam supported the initiation and operationalization of fisheries co-management systems in Quang Nam and Quang Tri provinces. Working with local partners, the project mobilized local inshore fishers and provided technical assistance for the establishment of five pioneer commune Fisheries Associations (FAs) in Quang Tri province and in six FAs in Quang Nam province.

The establishment of each FA required a series of community consultation meetings. This began with an assessment of the need for FA establishment with the fishing communities. These meetings were usually followed by at least three more consultations with the community to discuss, draft and approve the FA charter and other necessary

supporting documents needed for the official establishment and approval of the FA by the local authorities. Local fisherfolk were then able to register as FA members. The process was completed with an induction ceremony at which the decision for FA establishment was announced to the members and the FA Executive Board (EB) members were elected by voting.

Prior to the establishment of local FAs, in 2010, RFLP Viet Nam also supported the establishment of the Provincial Fisheries Association (PFA) in Quang Tri province, with the purpose of coordinating, networking and providing support to local FA activities.

2. Establishment of the fisheries co-management board

By May 2013, all the 14 Fisheries Associations in the project communes had established Fisheries Co-management Boards. The key function of these Boards included settling issues relating to capture fisheries and resource management among local people in order to minimize conflict and to allocate fishing rights to fishing communities. The establishment process started with negotiations among the Commune People's Committee (CPC), the FAs and fishing communities to identify the roles of each stakeholder and potential Board member candidates. Typically, the Boards are composed of representatives of the CPC, FAs, the police and other related commune agencies.

The Fisheries Co-management Board (FCB) members are expected to meet monthly to discuss ways to assist the FA and community members, and to monitor and evaluate co-management operations. At each meeting, the FCB reports on

progress of implementing the co-management plan for that month, and the achievements, shortcomings and proposed activities for the following month.

3. Development of community plans for inshore fisheries and habitat management

In order to improve FA members and CPC fisheries officers' awareness of, and capacity in fisheries management, training courses were conducted to introduce them to participatory tools for management, catch monitoring, species composition, gear-quantity monitoring, community mobilisation and behavioural change, as well as legal and regulatory issues.

The techniques and skills acquired enabled them to take part in a participatory survey for resource assessment, based on which community plans were developed. The community plans for resource and habitat management included water and coastal area use zoning, prohibited fishing gears, closed areas and seasons, fine rates and punishments for violations as well as natural resource protection levy rates. The steps taken during community plan development were:

- Drafting the community regulation and action plan for fisheries management;
- Organizing a community meeting to discuss, refine and approve the management plan;
- Meeting with the CPC to review the management plan;
- Meeting with district departments to review the management plan; and,
- Finalizing and the issue of the plan by the FA with CPC endorsement.

4. Defining and building the fisheries co-management units

Based on the results of a series of community consultations, an area of the sea was defined as the zone where inshore fisheries co-management would take place. This was followed by reaching consensus regarding community regulations and action plans for this area.

Maps were drawn and distributed so that local people were able to identify the boundaries and geographical coordinates of commune co-

management zones, as well as to understand the regulation and plan for commune fisheries co-management.

Favourable legal background

In 2010, the Vietnamese government issued policies and legal documents as the basis for enforcing co-management following the guideline¹ issued by the Directorate of Fisheries. As a result, provincial sea territories are defined. In particular, Thua Thien Hue province has regulations¹ relating

Result 1: Increased FA membership coverage in the community

No.	FA name	# Members	# Members	# Female members	# Female members
		Dec 2011	May 2013	Dec 2011	May 2013
	TOTAL	1,196	2,081	12	471
	Quang Tri Province				
1	Vinh Thai FA	262	329	9	65
2	Trieu Van FA	101	127	0	26
3	Trieu Lang FA	221	250	0	30
4	Hai An FA	80	127	0	47
5	Hai Khe FA	63	112	1	31
	Thua Thien Hue Province				
6	Phong Hai FA	120	224	0	104
7	Phu Thuan Coastal FA	85	114	0	29
8	Vinh Thanh Coastal FA 1	45	127	0	18
	Quang Nam Province				
9	Duy Nghia FA	25	74	1	17
10	Duy Hai FA	46	118	0	28
11	Binh Minh FA	50	119	1	28
12	Binh Hai FA	38	151	0	30
13	Binh Nam FA	30	114	0	0
14	Tam Tien FA	30	95	0	18

to fishing rights allocation to Fisheries Associations, which do not yet exist in Quang Nam and Quang Tri provinces.

Results

The formal establishment of the PFA and local FAs for inshore fishers was a first for Quang Nam and Quang Tri provinces and marked an important milestone for the transition to a new capture fisheries management scheme and the adoption of a co-management approach.



FA members burning illegal fishing gear

Key activities implemented by FAs to date

1. FA congress organized: This was the first activity implemented by each FA. It marked the establishment of an officially recognized local community organization representing fishers for the first time.
2. Division into specialist or geographic FA sub-groups covering capture fisheries, fish-sauce making, and aquaculture for better management and exchange of ideas among people of same interests. Several processing sub-groups include women.
3. Visits were made to sick members or those in difficulty to foster solidarity among the members. This was highly appreciated by fisher household members as it gave them a strong sense of group bonding.
4. Coordinated assistance from the project ensured that support and benefits were distributed fairly and according to the openly agreed and relevant criteria.
5. FA funds are being sourced from seed funds provided by the RFLP, membership fees, fines, and in some cases profits from RFLP supported livelihoods activities.
6. Regulations for FA operation and a community-based plan for resource management were developed and approved by FA members with technical assistance provided by RFLP specialists.
7. Equipment provided by RFLP (cool boxes, mobile phones, trolleys, book cases, etc.) has been efficiently used for FA operation and activities.
8. In Trieu Lang commune, of Quang Tri province, a voluntary beach clean-up team was established.



Women and men participating in a FA meeting

Operationalizing the Fisheries Associations

Building upon the formal establishment of the FA system and network, RFLP Viet Nam also helped improve the operational capacity of these local FAs by providing a series of practical training courses and by implementing project activities. In addition, the project also initiated natural resource and fisheries assessments as well as fisheries resource planning in 2011 working alongside the FAs.

The FAs have proved effective in enhancing the economic activities of FA member households through support received to improve food processing, direct marketing of aquatic products, livestock production and other business activities which have produced socio-economic benefits and

livelihoods improvements for local coastal inshore fishing communities in central Viet Nam. However, the role of FAs as resource management entities still needs further strengthening.

Positive changes felt by communities

The key benefits felt by fishers and their families has been a sense of belonging to a group, which has given them more strength and made them feel less vulnerable, due to better access to information and knowledge sharing. These types of benefits are problematic to quantify, but have translated into small but consistent changes that are gradually encouraging more and more people to become FA members. Some of these changes are described in the table below:

Before	After
Fishers fished indiscriminately and unselectively, capturing everything including turtles and fish regardless of size.	The FA regulations have made communities more aware of better capture fisheries, processing and resource protection practices. They remind each other that small fish have low prices. Changes have come from analysis and discussion during meetings, and not from penalties. In particular, in Trieu Van commune (Quang Tri) , one sea turtle was found and the local authorities were notified so that it could be appropriately handled.
Fishers worked independently and often against each other.	FA members have opportunities to meet up, to share experience and to help each other in production activities. Fisher solidarity has strengthened. Two stories in Trieu Van commune (Quang Tri) illustrate this: 1. One fisher died at sea. Before, people would have been very reluctant to help bringing the corpse back home as it was believed to bring bad luck. However, now that they are in the same FA, three fishers helped bring the corpse back from sea for burial on land. 2. A vessel in Trieu An commune (a non-project neighbouring commune) had an accident at sea. The FA in Trieu Van was able to mobilize their members to conduct their rescue.
Fish-sauce making was done by individual households.	Collective fish sauce production has been established and the fish sauce is being registered with a brand name. The producers are working more closely together for increased benefits. Extra income has been generated for poorer coastal households that had few other income generation opportunities, through RFLP livelihoods model implementation.
Access to training courses was limited for fishers communities	Fishers and their families have access to government training on government regulations, disaster preparedness, livestock production and processing. Aquatic catch is better preserved thanks to training given by RFLP Viet Nam and the provision of cool boxes. Fishers provided with aerators are getting significantly higher prices for their live swimming crabs.
There were no resource protection /management plans	Each FA has supported the drafting of a community-based resource protection plan which has been endorsed by the local authorities. This will serve as the basis for the collaboration between the FA and other functional agencies when they need assistance to handle fishing and conservation violations. Local officials report that the participatory process used to draft the community resource protection plans, has resulted in greater community buy-in and offences have declined.

Lessons learned

Despite these initial benefits, some challenges remain and need to be addressed to ensure the sustainability of the Fisheries Associations after project completion.

- **Limited financial resources for sustainable operation of the FAs**

At present, the FAs are operating based mainly on the seed fund provided by the RFLP, by the membership fees, income from fines and a proportion of the net profits from RFLP supported livelihoods activities. However, the major risk is that, once the assistance from alternative livelihoods model implementation ceases, that local communities will no longer see the benefits of FA membership. Fisheries Associations must be seen as being a socio-occupational organization representing and servicing fishers and their communities. They need to operate and develop based on the nature of their activities, rather than focusing on collecting membership fees or requesting funding assistance from the local authorities/projects. In order to be financially independent, FAs should consider income generation through collective marketing of their aquatic products in the mountainous interior areas of Quang Nam province.

- **Limited operational capacity of the FA Executive Board (FA EB)**

It has been identified that large commune areas present one of the biggest difficulties for effective management by the FA Executive Board. Additionally, not all FA Executive Board members are fully devoted to their FA work as they are also local government staff members and are busy with their regular work. None of the FAs currently have their own office, which also limits work



Fishers participating in fisheries management activities

effectiveness.

- **Local government lack trust in communities**

At this stage, FA Executive Boards in Quang Nam and Quang Tri provinces remain dominated by Commune People's Committee leaders. To a great extent, this has prevented the process of power delegation to communities which is necessary for successful co-management. In the particular context of Viet Nam, local authorities are often not yet ready to delegate power to communities, partly because they are hesitant to allocate fishing rights and are also unclear of the process to be followed. Community organizations such as FAs are also not considered by local government as sufficiently well-organized to be trusted with fishing rights allocation and as full partners in fisheries co-management.

- **Technology bias mentality of government agencies**

The staff in charge of co-management development in related local government agencies tend to lack social development expertise. Consequently, co-management is, in many cases, perceived as an end in itself, rather than as a dynamic process contributing to effective resource management.

- **Take into account gender consideration and women's roles in Fisheries Associations**

When Fisheries Associations were initiated at the commune level, the RFLP in Viet Nam did not sufficiently emphasize the relevance of women's participation. The term "Fisheries Association" initially was thought to be a community-based organization for fishers, who were all men in the project locations. Fisheries Associations were therefore misunderstood to target and include only male-fishers. As a result, initially very few women were FA members, ranging from 0-15%. On realizing this issue, the project took measures to ensure that the FAs promoted FA membership for women. RFLP has provided the following incentives to promote women membership on the FAs; (i) FA membership fees have been set by household, rather than by individuals, i.e. if both husband and wife are members, they only pay one membership fee (ii) Financial support for livelihoods model implementation is only provided to women who are FA members and iii) Part of the net profit from women's livelihoods activity is repaid to the FA fund e.g. 15% of the purchase cost of the piglets supplied by RFLP for fattening is repaid by the beneficiary household.

Recommendations

Allocate fishing rights to provide incentives to fishers

The legal allocation of fishing use rights to fishers and their FAs provides a major and immediate incentive for fishers to become fully involved in partnership with the local authorities in the sustainable co-management of fisheries. The local authorities should be encouraged to realize the benefits to be gained from allocating fishing rights to fishers and their FAs. Granting of collective or individual fishing use rights is the single most important spur for co-management promotion; without this external support is of reduced value.

The co-management process is a mechanism to promote dialogue

In the co-management process, Fisheries Associations (FA) were established to serve as a mechanism to promote dialogue on fisheries resource management between local government and local communities. As such, it is therefore vital that FAs have legal status and capacity. In addition the co-management process involves decentralization from the local authority. Therefore promotion of co-management should begin with



Fisheries Association members

capacity building for both communities and the local government to facilitate delegation of responsibilities from local government to communities.

Projects should keep abreast with the issuance and enforcement of legal documents that may impact on co-management implementation, and especially on institutional arrangements.

As co-management is relatively a new concept, national policies and regulations need to be

updated, especially at the district level and particularly since the District People's Committee have official oversight of Commune Fisheries Associations under current Vietnamese law. In order for FAs, to be fully supported by the local authorities, both institutions need to fully understand their roles and responsibilities, in order to agree and implement concrete actions. This is important for ensuring that the community-based rules and regulations for effective co-management of fisheries are in line with current laws



Members of the FA on a field visit

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About RFLP

The Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for South and Southeast Asia (RFLP) sets out to strengthen capacity among participating small-scale fishing communities and their supporting institutions in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam. The four-year (2009 – 2013) RFLP is funded by the Kingdom of Spain and implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) working in close collaboration with the national authorities responsible for fisheries in participating countries.