Evaluation of the Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme – GCP/RAS/237/SPA

Mid-Term Evaluation
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Office of Evaluation (OED)

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**Acronyms**

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AECID</td>
<td>Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperacion</td>
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<tr>
<td>APFIC</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission</td>
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<td>APRACA</td>
<td>Asia Pacific Agricultural and Rural Credit Association</td>
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<td>BFAR</td>
<td>Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (Philippines)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCRF</td>
<td>Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries</td>
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<td>CFi</td>
<td>Community Fisheries (Cambodia)</td>
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<td>CFZ</td>
<td>Community Fishing Zone</td>
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<td>CM</td>
<td>Co-management</td>
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<td>CMB</td>
<td>Cambodia</td>
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<td>FA</td>
<td>Fishing Association (Viet Nam)</td>
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<td>FAOR</td>
<td>FAO Representation</td>
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<td>FiA</td>
<td>Fisheries Administration (Cambodia)</td>
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<td>INS</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
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<td>LOA</td>
<td>Letter of Agreement</td>
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<td>LTO</td>
<td>Lead Technical Officer</td>
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<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
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<td>MF</td>
<td>Microfinance</td>
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<td>MTE</td>
<td>Mid-term Evaluation</td>
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<td>NACA</td>
<td>Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia and the Pacific</td>
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<td>NCC</td>
<td>National Coordinating Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td>National Director (Government)</td>
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<td>NDFA</td>
<td>National Directorate Fisheries and Aquaculture</td>
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<td>NPC</td>
<td>National Project Coordinator (RFLP)</td>
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<td>NPD</td>
<td>National Project Director (Government)</td>
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<td>PCO</td>
<td>(National) Project Coordination Office (RFLP)</td>
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<td>PH</td>
<td>Post-harvest</td>
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<td>PHI</td>
<td>The Philippines</td>
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<td>PMO</td>
<td>Project Management Office</td>
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<td>PMU</td>
<td>Provincial Management Unit (Viet Nam)</td>
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<td>PSC</td>
<td>Programme Steering Committee</td>
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<td>RAP</td>
<td>FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific</td>
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<td>RFLP</td>
<td>Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme</td>
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<td>SatS</td>
<td>Safety at Sea</td>
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<td>SEAFDEC</td>
<td>Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center</td>
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<td>SLED</td>
<td>Support for livelihoods enhancement and diversification</td>
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<td>SRL</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
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<td>SSF(s)</td>
<td>Small-scale fisher(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Technical Advisor</td>
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<td>TF</td>
<td>Task Force</td>
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<td>TIM</td>
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<td>VIE</td>
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Executive Summary

Background

ES1. The Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for South and Southeast Asia (RFLP)—GCP/RAS/237/SPA—supported by the Kingdom of Spain with a total budget of USD 19,549,000, began implementation in September 2009 in the participating countries of Cambodia, Indonesia, The Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam. It is scheduled to end in August 2013.

ES2. The MTE was requested by the RFLP project and conducted under the auspices of the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED). The purpose of the MTE was to provide recommendations for the remaining period of the programme to address any weaknesses and build on strengths, aimed at increasing the programme’s impact and ensuring its sustainability. The findings would also contribute to the thematic evaluation of FAO’s support to the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

Information about the evaluation

ES3. Prior to the MTE mission, a review of project documents, progress reports and background material was carried out. The MTE mission was conducted from 5 January to 6 February 2011. It began with discussions with the Project Management Office (PMO) and FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP) staff, followed by visits to three of the six participating countries, Viet Nam, Timor-Leste and Cambodia that included meetings with the RFLP country teams, a sample of beneficiary communities, national and local government officials, the FAO country offices, and international organizations, donors and NGOs.

ES4. Semi-structured interviews and discussions were used to obtain information with these stakeholders, and a questionnaire and telephone interviews with National Project Coordinators in Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Indonesia were used to gather information on the RFLP’s progress in those countries. The three country visits concluded with debriefings to the RFLP country staff and government partner agencies, and debriefings were held for the RFLP PMO and other interested staff in RAP, including the Assistant Director General/Regional Representative.

ES5. This report evaluates the RFLP against internationally accepted criteria that OED shares, namely relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. In addition, OED systematically included since 2010 gender mainstreaming for gender equality as a criterion in all evaluations. The criteria are rated using a six-point scale: Very poor—Poor—inadequate/unsatisfactory—Adequate/satisfactory—Good—Excellent. The MTE follows UN Evaluation Group Norms and Standards.

The programme

ES6. The RFLP was designed and implemented to address the “failure to manage the interface between fisheries and the wider external environment”, more specifically, the problems of deteriorating coastal marine resources, even as pressure on the fishery resources is increasing from competing uses by an increasing population, and the vulnerability of the
livelihoods of small-scale fishers who are dependent upon these resources. Small fishers comprise the highest proportion of coastal populations and are among the poorest and most vulnerable to any threat to their means and sources of livelihood. Some 80 percent of the seven million fishers in the Programme countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam) are small scale. Including the workers indirectly employed in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture, there is an estimated 25 million people who are depending on the sector for a living.

ES7. In the effort to tackle these issues, FAO identified five core problems: (i) the lack of mechanisms and capacity for joint management of the fisheries between the fishers and government authorities, (ii) the great vulnerability of small-scale fishers and their families in view of the risky occupation and exposed habitats; (iii) loss of income from fish and fishery products due to poor handling, preservation and processing practices and inequitable returns because of the marketing system; (iv) the need for alternative incomes to maintain the livelihood when fishing activities have to be reduced for sustainable resource management; and (v) the need for better access to microfinance to diversify income, adapt fishing equipment to new management regulations and reduce vulnerability.

ES8. Based on these, the following six outputs, and a set of activities for each, were formulated for the programme:

1. Co-management mechanisms for sustainable utilization of fishery resources
2. Improved safety and reduced vulnerability for fisher communities
3. Improved quality of fishery products and market chains
4. Strengthened existing and diversified alternative income opportunities for fisher households
5. Facilitated access to microfinance services for fishers, processors and vendors, and
6. Regional sharing of knowledge in support of livelihoods development and reduced vulnerability for fisher communities and of sustainable fisheries resource management.

ES9. The outcome and impact articulated for the RFLP were, respectively:

\textit{Outcome:} Strengthened capacity among participating small-scale fishing communities and their supporting institutions towards improved livelihoods and sustainable fisheries resources management.”

\textit{Impact:} Improved livelihoods and reduced vulnerability of small-scale fishing communities in the participating countries and in the South and Southeast Asia region.

ES10. The donor, AECID, selected the countries, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam, where the RFLP would be implemented, and the partner government agencies chose the participating communities. In total, the RFLP covers some 61 coastal communities.

\textit{Relevance}

ES11. The outputs and outcome of the RFLP are broadly aligned and relevant to the fisheries sector strategies of the participating countries. The programme seeks to address issues common to many countries in the region. Regionally, the programme is relevant. The RFLP’s relevance emerges from its being perhaps one of the few initiatives in the region to adopt a cross-country, lesson-sharing approach to SSF livelihoods and fisheries resource management. It also has the potential to provide information on how co-management (CM)
can contribute to large marine ecosystem conservation. The RFLP’s general aims are also reflected in the strategies of the FAO offices in the participating countries, and are aligned to FAO’s corporate aims.

ES12. The programme has been relevant to needs of the beneficiary communities, though the Safety at Sea output has generally been less of a priority for SSFs because most of them fish in shallow waters, relatively close to shore and do not experience many accidents. Similarly, the output for facilitating access to microfinance services has been of less relevance in several of the countries given SSF households credit needs. These households already borrow microfinance-size loans and these sums are insufficient to support a shift to other livelihoods and out of poverty. Access to larger loans is needed. The RFLP’s relevance is rated Good overall.

Quality of Design

ES13. During planning, no detailed analyses of the policy, institutional, market and community contexts were conducted to determine the relevance of all the outputs and to identify gaps and strengths for determining with government partners how the programme should intervene to add value. Little attention was also devoted to assessing whether the capacity of government institutions and other partner entities were sufficient for planning, achieving and monitoring interventions for the outputs to quality standards, and if the benefits generated could be sustained after the programme ended. Poor planning has been responsible for many of the hindrances to efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability that the RFLP now faces. The country experiences suggest that where the RFLP was better-aligned to national and sub-national co-management and economic development plans, there has been more progress.

ES14. Other shortcomings have consisted of the following: the lack of integration between livelihoods development and fisheries resource co-management, and an inadequate framework illustrating how the outputs link and add up to a larger outcome; an overambitious design given the large number of outputs, sites and participating countries and the relatively low funding available to achieve significant results; the absence of clear and specific objectives and outcomes; and the inability of the monitoring and reporting system capture real outcomes and lessons. The design of community needs assessments and techno-economic feasibility studies during implementation have also generally been inadequate, leading to weak bases for selecting interventions.

ES15. The programme has generally had supportive government partners, though has experienced challenges in Viet Nam. Regarding the governance arrangements established, the higher-level bodies have the potential to discuss field experiences and lessons and conduct strategic planning, yet the opportunity appears to be largely missed. Overall, the quality of the RFLP’s design is rated as Inadequate/Unsatisfactory.

Efficiency

ES16. The programme’s expenditure at this point is roughly half the total original budget and the rate of delivery is now satisfactory after a delayed start and a low level of activities in the first year. The RFLP has been under proper implementation for only a little over a year. The return on investment in terms of outcomes has been below where it should be at this stage, and the spread of limited resources over several outputs and sites, with weak local
government implementation has also lowered cost-effectiveness. Delays have also occurred because the Letter of Agreement (LOA) and procurement processes are slow. For purposes of providing country ownership, the LOA process is the necessary approach for the RFLP to take though it is not equivalent to a capacity-strengthening strategy and better planning might reduce delays. The RFLP could also shift more funds to field activities away from those with little direct relation to the programme’s aims.

ES17. The Programme Management Office (PMO) has been active in responding to the various challenges to implementation that have arisen. However, it could provide more focus and higher-level strategic direction to the Project Coordination Offices (PCOs) on livelihoods enhancement and its integration with co-management. Work plans reflect that a very large variety of highly different livelihood options have been entertained without significant prior consideration to what their scale, benefits and implementation challenges might be. The National Project Coordinators (NPCs) have displayed good management and adapted their strategies to bring more value to their respective countries. The efficiency of the RFLP has been **Inadequate/Unsatisfactory to Adequate/Satisfactory** overall.

**Effectiveness**

ES18. A very large number of activities have been implemented for most of the outputs, without any significant results having become apparent. Co-management (CM) has been somewhat more successful in producing deliverables (outputs), though the value added of the RFLP could have been greater. A difficulty lies in assessing the outcomes as there is no M&E system to gather data on outcomes and impacts. Overall, effectiveness and progress have been **Inadequate/Unsatisfactory**.

**Output 1: Co-management**

ES19. The capacity of SSF organizations and of the governments to implement effective co-management for fishery resource sustainability remains to be developed. The RFLP brings some value in working directly with SSF groups, though in many places is operating under CM frameworks that have not devolved real authority and resources to them. The programme has not devoted much energy to building these groups’ ownership and their knowledge of their own impacts on the resources. The policy and regulatory frameworks for co-management could also have been better addressed and the various stakeholders affecting SSF livelihoods more explicitly involved. However, the political, institutional and social situations the RFLP is working in are complex, and PCOs have been innovative in adapting the programme to them.

ES20. A central concern is that the RFLP’s support for livelihoods enhancement and diversification (SLED) is not integrated with CM. Some SLED has led to schemes that may lead to increased fishing pressure. Given the complexity of environment-livelihoods interactions and the RFLP’s aim for resource sustainability, CM needs to be the core around which other outputs are organized. The Philippines (PHI) PCO model does this in part and offers a good framework for the other countries to follow.

**Output 2: Improved safety and reduced vulnerability**

ES21. The output was limited to reducing SSF accidents at sea, and improving the health and safety of SSFs or those of others in the fishing trade by other means was not included in the scope of the output. It consisted in large part of providing safety training and equipment to SSFs. Yet because many of the communities fish in shallow waters and close to shore, and
experience few accidents, according to the reporting systems developed, the equipment has not benefited them much. However, communities in Viet Nam that fish in deeper waters have benefited, reporting a reduction in accidents. Accident reporting systems have contributed to national safety systems in some countries, and the output was innovatively adapted to disaster risk reduction in PHI. Efforts for improved boat-building for greater safety have been more linked to SSF needs and in Timor-Leste it was usefully adapted to include engine repair, benefiting SSFs substantially. A concern is that communication technologies provided for safety may also be used to increase fish capture, which does not promote sustainability and calls for CM controls.

Output 3: Post-harvest processing and marketing
ES22. Significant benefits from training on fish-processing techniques and food safety to women from SSF households have not resulted due to lack of follow-up assistance in terms of equipment provision and, more importantly, marketing support, and the products proposed would not be competitive in larger markets. Trainings of government staff and communities in value-chain analysis and hygiene and safety, respectively, have often been brief, leaving the capacity gained modest or unclear. Provision of ice and information for its improved use for hygiene has been done, though without adequately assuring reliable ice supply. Underlying these shortcomings were the lack of post-harvest overviews and good techno-economic feasibility studies for the interventions. These analyses would likely have pointed to the need to prioritize the supply and marketing of fresh fish, which is more profitable, and to view post-harvest processing as a second option. Marketing support also needs to be emphasized.

Output 4: Strengthened existing and diversified alternative income opportunities
ES23. Generally, with the exception of PHI, the quality of analysis of the technical and economic feasibility and impact of potential livelihoods schemes to be supported has been inadequate. This has led overall to a large number of small projects approved without sufficient rationale for their selection. In-depth gender analysis has also generally been absent. Lacking has been a wider, more strategic approach involving sector entities outside fisheries and in local development planning.

ES24. Most pilot projects have been initiated only recently due to implementation delays, making it too early to see any outcomes. Many of the projects are either too small in scale, involve only a modest number of beneficiaries, will not have a significant impact on incomes, are not technically or financially viable in the long-term, and/or are not well-targeted to poorer, fishing-dependent households. Institutional strengthening and market access have not been strong features of this work, and there has been little systematic examination of how existing alternate livelihoods could be enhanced. RFLP is missing an opportunity to bring value-added contributions and the programme could draw on the experiences and lessons of other organizations for this work. In PHI, more analytical approaches and rigorous analyses were carried out involving a wide range of agencies to define the strategy and identify innovative approaches for supporting new livelihoods.

ES25. An issue to be addressed is that the RFLP has generally not pursued livelihoods enhancement and diversification under the framework of CM for fisheries sustainability, and some of the schemes implemented indicate they could have adverse effects on coastal resources.

Output 5: Facilitated access for microfinance
RFLP mid term

ES26. Implementation on the output generally started late. But the output was also somewhat misconceived during design: SSF households are already borrowing small loans from various formal non-government and quasi-public lenders, and from informal ones, to support their existing livelihoods. Additionally, SSF co-management groups which the RFLP seeks to have supply small loans to members will not be able to acquire the necessary assets for this. Microfinance-sized loans would be insufficient to shift SSFs to other livelihoods and move out of poverty and SSF households recognize their need for larger credit lines. Some PCOs are exploring the possibility of credit from larger banks, and as improved microfinance access could reduce SSF debt burdens, efforts are also underway in Sri Lanka and PHI to expand this access. Sri Lanka is also developing an insurance scheme with partners, an important step to reduce SSF vulnerability. But the RFLP as a whole is not pursuing it and is thus missing an opportunity to bring value. Improved consideration of the existing SSF borrowing practices, developing a clear strategy and integrating it into a livelihoods framework would have led to greater progress.

Output 6: Regional sharing of knowledge

ES27. Substantial efforts for the output were delayed, but a good website sharing stories from the RFLP has been developed. Case studies and best practices have yet to be produced, which is planned for the second half of the programme. Presently, “significant change” stories are being collected, but more in-depth analysis of them is needed. Underlying the performance on this output has been the absence of an M&E system that gathers data on outcomes, impacts and the factors responsible for them so that real lessons could be formulated and shared.

ES28. Cross-learning among the PCOs has been sought through regional technical workshops on specific themes, though the opportunities for more in-depth sharing of experiences across the country teams could be enhanced. For policy improvements in the region, the RFLP’s experiences are presented in meetings of the Asia Pacific Fisheries Commission (APFIC), and links have been forged with a large number of international and regional organizations. Yet there have been no visible indications that regional meetings of this kind have influenced national policies and programmes. The information-sharing and collaboration approach with these partners could be more developed and strategic.

Gender Mainstreaming

ES29. The relevance of the RFLP’s gender mainstreaming work is high, though there are a number of areas for improvement in its design and effectiveness. A key product of the work has been the manual ‘Mainstreaming gender into project cycle management in the fisheries sector’, widely disseminated in the RFLP countries. The guide can be a good primer for staff, but the extent to which the complex gender relations within fisheries are explored in-depth and the information can be applied in the specific community contexts is modest. There is also little evidence that the manual is being used in the sites. At root is a lack of a clear notion in the RFLP of what gender mainstreaming is striving to achieve in contexts with gendered divisions of skilled labor.

ES30. The most visible work has consisted of brief community trainings on gender inequality, yet it was overambitious to expect these to have had much impact. The RFLP has also sought to ensure adequate participation of women in activities, and has sought to direct PH processing activities to them. However, the RFLP has inadvertently used simple percentages as its main data to indicate the complex processes of mainstreaming, and needs
assessments and feasibility analyses have not examined properly the roles of and benefits for women. Better tools for analysis and mainstreaming are needed, and improved PH and SLED strategies offer an opportunity to apply them. The effectiveness of the component is rated Inadequate/Unsatisfactory overall.

**Impact**

ES31. There are some positive indications of future impact on the communities and to some potentially negative effects on the environment from certain schemes, though no intended impacts have been realized at this stage. While the rating on this criterion is Inadequate/Unsatisfactory it is probably too early to expect any impacts given the delay in implementation and the time required for them to emerge. Yet there is a concern that given the less than two years and hence short time remaining the improvements will not be notable. There have been a few unintended positive effects on government policy. Beyond these cases, there have not been any notable impacts on government policies or institutional capacities.

**Sustainability**

ES32. The prospects for sustainability at this point in time, after a little more than one year of implementation, are Inadequate/Unsatisfactory. The likelihood of donor support for a second phase is low. Presently, the outcomes for livelihoods are too few or small for their sustainability to be considered, and many would not be maintained if the RFLP were to not be present. The primary risk to sustainability is the lack of institutional capacity in local governments for planning and implementing large-scale, environmentally sustainable, diversified and alternative livelihoods. The knowledge, organizational capacity, coordination and resources for it are not in place, and the budgets of sub-national entities are small. Much information-sharing, coordination and resource-generation needs to happen by and among them.

ES33. Non-fisheries sectors, private sector actors, NGOs and donors have not been adequately involved in the RFLP’s governance and implementation for alternative livelihoods development despite some RFLP efforts to bring them in. An RFLP asset is the solid support of many of the NPDs, who could help build sustainability. The likelihood for sustainability is substantial though in PHI, where strong government interest and commitments to co-funding have emerged. The governance structures for CM and SLED there also involve a diverse set of agencies. Prospects for sustainability in SRL appear fair as well.

**Conclusions**

ES34. After less than two years of implementation—effectively only about one—with an inadequately planned and overambitious programme, occasionally challenging partner government relations, and lengthy administrative processes, the RFLP has not been able to achieve much in the form of results. The design, efficiency and effectiveness challenges have also accumulated to pose significant risks to the sustainability of the programme and to the likelihood that benefits will be achieved. The RFLP is thus experiencing within a negative chain of effects whereby the weaknesses of each aspect or at each stage of the programme have produced problems in all subsequent ones. The question is what measures, specific and broad, and feasible can be taken to reform the “system” in order to enhance the RFLP’s effectiveness and sustainability.
ES35. The programme does also possess strengths that must be capitalized on. These are its overall substantial relevance to the national fishery, poverty reduction and decentralization agendas of the countries; its potential to share analyses and lessons of what has and has not worked across the region for replication and up-scaling; the committed, capable and innovative NPCs and their staff who know their country contexts well; the strong support from many of the NPDs and key government agencies, and interest of sub-national staff; the hard work and management expertise of the PMO, and the interest and willingness of the communities. In light of the various challenges and strengths, the MTE makes the following nine recommendations to improve the programme:

**Recommendations**

In light of the RFLP’s various challenges and strengths, the MTE makes the following ten recommendations:

**For the RFLP and Partner Governments on Effectiveness and Sustainability**

**Recommendation 1:**

Focus RFLP implementations on a smaller set of selected, more promising sites for more comprehensive work to produce substantial livelihood impacts and solid lessons for sharing and up-scaling, while still maintaining some level of activity in the other communities, and pursue the Safety at Sea and microfinance access outputs further only if rigorous analyses reveal that they will contribute significantly to improved livelihoods and reduced vulnerability and communities request these interventions.

**Recommendation 2:**

Pursue livelihoods diversification, including post-harvest and marketing promotion in a more integrated manner with fisheries resource co-management so as to ensure that livelihoods development and post-harvest projects do not have negative consequences for coastal resources. At the same time broaden the co-management framework, as some RFLP country teams are doing, to include livelihoods enhancement by involving different government agencies (fisheries and non-fisheries) and private actors for the purpose of developing larger-impacting schemes and demonstrating to communities that benefits can come in the place of natural resource use.

**Recommendation 3:**

Focus gender mainstreaming work in rigorously analyzing the effects, positive and negative, of potential livelihood enhancement/diversification (including post-harvest) schemes and fisheries co-management decisions (as some women participate in fishing), on women given their responsibilities, and on the relations between men and women, as a part of livelihoods options assessments and feasibility analyses. These assessments should be done with community participation, and as some gendered divisions of labour are likely to continue they should also be used to foster the men’s respect for women and their tasks.
Recommendation 4:
Invest more effort in educating SSFs on co-management, cultivating their understanding of their own practices on fisheries resources and how conserving these resources could benefit them in the long-term so fishers can take more responsibility in co-management; identify where co-management legislation and regulations need to be further improved to enable more effective co-management and SSFs more ownership and work with the partner governments to initiate a process of reform; and, engage more fully the various public and private stakeholders (illegal/commercial fishers, other communities, the range of government agencies) to develop more meaningful co-management arrangements.

Recommendation 5:
The PMO should use its broad vision of the RFLP’s aims to provide greater and higher-level, strategic guidance to the PCOs to help them focus their work in order to produce more substantive impacts in their respective contexts, and support them further in learning from the fields of livelihoods diversification/development and natural resource co-management. It could do the latter by providing models and lessons from these fields, best-practice tools, methods and examples of needs assessments and feasibility analysis.

Recommendation 6:
Formulate and implement an explicit, concerted strategy for the remainder of the programme to strengthen the technical, planning and management capacity of government partner institutions, and the coordination among these entities along with non-fisheries agencies (extension, forestry, small-business, infrastructure, etc.) and market and NGO actors to support larger-scale diversified livelihoods development and co-management and sustain the RFLP’s work in the long-term and for the selected sites. To strengthen capacity and coordination, provide more in-depth, hands-on training through twinning arrangements between RFLP and government staff, which will also ensure quality delivery during implementation. Budget savings from reducing the geographic and thematic scope of the RFLP would allow such a capacity-building strategy.

Recommendation 7:
Develop a long-term strategic plan for the remainder of the programme for each country and for each of the three remaining country-level outputs and the regional lesson-sharing one, including steps that will allow for exit and sustainability. These plans should make explicit the theory of change that will be employed for each intervention, i.e. the logical sequence of intermediate results that will be pursued to achieve the desired outcomes.

Recommendation 8:
Begin to share the experiences of the RFLP now, both the successes and shortcomings, internally among the PCOs, and with the RFLP governing bodies, ministry officials, regional organizations and donors, to help improve performance, disseminate lessons and develop roots for the programme’s sustainability. And, in the next three months, with the longer-term strategic plans developed (Recommendation 7), create and implement with the help of external training intervention-specific M&E plans that will capture outcomes for
RFLP mid term

learning and lesson-sharing for the programme and its partners.

**Recommendation 9: To AECID on effectiveness and sustainability**

Provide a six-month, no-cost extension to the RFLP to better enable it to generate outcomes, impacts and models, and permit it to allocate some of its funds to: 1) address higher-level policy and legal gaps in national co-management frameworks so that small-scale fisher groups may be more empowered in the long-term, and 2) strengthen in a concerted manner the capacity of local government institutions to sustain the programme and develop improved livelihoods for SSF communities.

**Recommendation 10: To FAO on quality of design**

While the MTE recognizes that efforts are currently underway in FAO to develop design standards, it is recommended that the Organization develops rigorous and clear standards and requirements for the design of projects and programmes (including for relevance, contextual assessment, government ownership, SMART\(^1\) objectives, the feasibility of strategies, M&E and other elements) along with guidance material for staff to meet them, and the institutional processes within FAO where the Project Review Committee will use the standards to review projects/programmes and OED will use them to evaluate the initiatives.

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\(^1\) Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented and Time-bound
1 Introduction

1 The Regional Fisheries Livelihood Programme for South and Southeast Asia (GCP/RAS/237/SPA) is a partnership project among the Kingdom of Spain, FAO and the governments of the participating countries, Cambodia, Indonesia, The Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam. It is a four-year project with a funding from Spain through the Spanish Agency for International Development (AECID) of USD 19,549,000.

2 The RFLP was launched on 1 September 2009 and is scheduled to end on 31 August 2013. The mid-term evaluation (MTE) of the Project was carried out in January—February 2012. The MTE was requested by the RFLP project and conducted under the auspices of the Office of Evaluation (OED) of the FAO. The three-person MTE team comprised an OED staff with a natural resources management background as the team leader, a small-scale fisheries and post harvest specialist, and a regional technical cooperation specialist with a background in regional aquaculture development. The Terms of Reference of the MTE, which specify its purpose, scope and methodology, is in Annex 1.2

3 The MTE field work was conducted from 5 January to 6 February 2011. It began with consultations and discussions with RFLP PMO and FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP) officers in Bangkok followed by missions to three of the six RFLP participating countries, namely Viet Nam (VIE), Timor-Leste (TIM) and Cambodia (CMB) in that order and telephone interviews with the National Project Coordinators (NPCs) and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) officers of Indonesia (INS), The Philippines (PHI) and Sri Lanka (SRL). It culminated with a debriefing in Bangkok with the PMO staff and the Regional Fisheries Officer, and a meeting with the Regional Representative

1.1 Background to the RFLP and purpose of the evaluation

4 The idea that materialized into the RFLP was conceived after a visit of the Queen of Spain to various projects in Aceh following the tsunami that were assisted by the Kingdom of Spain and implemented by FAO. FAO carried out the pre-project assessment and the project design and development. A four year project was formulated by a team of experts which would be implemented in five countries in Southeast Asia and one country in South Asia. The focus of the project is the coastal ecosystem, coastal communities dependent on inshore fisheries and their government service providers.

5 The broad context of the programme is a gradually deteriorating coastal marine resource while pressure on the fishery resources is increasing from competing uses by an increasing population. Among the users are the small fishers which comprise the highest proportion of coastal populations and are among the poorest and most vulnerable to any threat to their means and sources of livelihood. Some 80 percent of the seven million fishers in the programme countries (CMB, INS, SRL, TIM and VIE) are small scale. Including the workers indirectly employed in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture, there is an estimated 25 million people who are depending on the sector for a living. While the national and sector

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2 A week prior to the mission, OED and the RFLP were informed that the Team Leader/livelihoods specialist selected would not be able to participate in the evaluation. A new equally qualified livelihoods specialist was hired and the OED Evaluation Manager assumed the role of Team Leader.
development priorities may vary between the five participating countries they have the following elements in common – optimum utilization of fishery resources, conservation of the coastal habitat, improved livelihood and poverty alleviation in coastal communities and institutional development for better governance of and service to the fisheries sector.

6 The fundamental issue that the programme seeks to address is the “failure to manage the interface between fisheries and the wider external environment.” To resolve this core problem would require dealing with the specific problems associated with it. Five of these were identified as needing urgent attention, namely, (i) the lack of mechanisms and capacity for joint management of the fisheries between the fishers and government authorities, in other words, there is no co-management regime; (ii) the great vulnerability of small scale fishers and their families in view of the risky occupation and exposed habitats; (iii) loss of income from fish and fishery products due to poor handling, preservation and processing practices and inequitable returns because of the marketing system; (iv) the need for alternative incomes to maintain the livelihood when fishing activities have to be reduced for sustainable resource management; and (v) the need for better access to microfinance to diversify income, adapt fishing equipment to new management regulations and reduce vulnerability.

7 Based on these issues, the following six outputs, and a set of activities for each, were formulated for the RFLP:
1. Co-management mechanisms for sustainable utilization of fishery resources
2. Improved safety and reduced vulnerability for fisher communities
3. Improved quality of fishery products and market chains
4. Strengthened existing and diversified alternative income opportunities for fisher households
5. Facilitated access to microfinance services for fishers, processors and vendors, and
6. Regional sharing of knowledge in support of livelihoods development and reduced vulnerability for fisher communities and of sustainable fisheries resource management.

8 The outcome and impact articulated for the RFLP were, respectively:

\textit{Outcome}: Strengthened capacity among participating small-scale fishing communities and their supporting institutions towards improved livelihoods and sustainable fisheries resources management."

\textit{Impact}: Improved livelihoods and reduced vulnerability of small-scale fishing communities in the participating countries and in the South and Southeast Asia region.

9 The choice of countries was made by the donor government, one important consideration being the presence of ongoing Spanish assistance in a number of the countries. The geographical target areas were determined by the national implementing agencies while the project communities were decided through consultations among primary stakeholders in the identified target areas that included the national fishery administration and its provincial offices, local governments, fishery organizations and other local institutions involved in fisheries.

10 At the time of the evaluation, project activities have been established in some 61 coastal communities: 15 communes in the four coastal provinces of CMB, 4 regencies in Nusa Tenggara Province in INS, 11 municipalities in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte in the PHI, 3 communities around three important bodies of water, namely, an estuary and two lagoons in SRL and 2 more on the coast, 10 fishing communities whose nuclei are the village
with a landing site in ten Districts in TIM and 16 communes in three provinces in Central VIE. 3

11 The MTE was aimed to (i) assess the RFLP programme design, approach, work plan implementation and progress of activities towards the improvement of livelihoods in coastal fisher communities; and (ii) provide guidance and recommendations for the remaining period of RFLP that would address any weaknesses and to build on identified strengths, aimed at increasing likely impact and sustainability as well as achieving the project’s expected outcome.

12 The MTE findings would also contribute to the thematic evaluation of FAO’s support to the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries; the CCRF evaluation team met with the MTE in Bangkok.

1.2 Methodology of the evaluation

13 Throughout its process, the evaluation was conducted in a consultative and transparent manner with all programme staff and external stakeholders. To verify all preliminary findings and prior to formulating any conclusions, the MTE team triangulated all information received, using the internal and external interviews and documents and the team members’ own expertise. This was done to ensure that the MTE develop evidence-based findings and conclusions. Both the planning and implementation of the evaluation were done in accordance with UN Evaluation Group Norms and Standards.

14 The major sources of information were documents from the programme and semi-structured interviews and discussions with personnel directly involved in the programme’s design, planning and implementation, with personnel, invariably government officers at national and local levels, associated in the various aspects of programme development, administration and implementation, groups of beneficiaries in the programme sites, and personnel of partner and relevant regional and international organizations and agencies. The background and reference materials included the programme document, technical progress reports, technical reports originated by the programme, and the information contained on the programme website www.rflp.org. Other references included reports of APFIC workshops, especially the one that was organized in October 2009 when RFLP was freshly launched and provided conceptual guidance to the co-management approach of RFLP and country-level information and practical guidance to the alternative livelihood and microfinance components of the programme. 4

15 The national- and site-level information in the three countries visited was obtained through discussions with government fishery officials, the FAO country representation (FAOR), government-counterpart National Project Directors (NPDs) and other sub-national staff, the RFLP’s National Project Coordinators (NPCs) and staff, national and international consultants, the donor community and the programme beneficiaries. Semi-structured and in-depth interviews were the key tool used to gather the information. The interviews with sub-

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3A fairly comprehensive overview and up to date activity reports of the RFLP are found at www.rflp.org, the easy-to-navigate website.

national government staff and beneficiary communities were facilitated by interpreters engaged by the Programme specifically for the MTE. The MTE team also attended the National Coordinating Committee (NCC) Meeting of RFLP VIE held in Hue, Viet Nam, on 12-13 January.

At the end of each country visit, a debriefing session for the NPD and the RFLP Project Coordinating Office (PCO) was convened for the findings to be discussed and validated and the provisional recommendations discussed. The field work of the MTE culminated with further discussions with RFLP and FAO RAP staff and the presentation and discussion of the provisional findings and recommendations of the Team with the RFLP Regional Project Management staff (3-6 February). This first report incorporates the salient results of the country debriefings and debriefing session in Bangkok.

To summarize the MTE obtained programme management and status overview from the PMO and FAO RAP; national and local level information through discussions with government fishery officials, FAO country representation, and NPDs; overview of programme implementation and national context of the programme from the National Coordinating Office; detailed and site context and implementation issues from PMUs and Commune officers (VIE), site manager and section heads of the National Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture or NDFA (TIM), and Cantonment Fishery Administration officials and Commune officials (CMB); perceptions, experiences and implementation issues from semi-structured in-depth interviews (average of 3 hours per group) with the programme beneficiaries in the sites (average of 3 hours/group).

A total of 17 groups of programme beneficiaries in 17 different sites were interviewed: 7 in VIE, 2 in TIM and 8 in CMB.

The MTE also interviewed representatives of international, regional, donor and national organizations. These included staff from the UNEP’s Coral Reef and UNDAF units, UNDP, APRACA, NACA and SEAFDEC in Bangkok; Norwegian aid desk in Hanoi; AECID and Maritime Police in TIM, EU, DANIDA and AECID in Phnom Penh; and the NGO, MORODOK, in Koh Kong CMB.

This report evaluates the RFLP against internationally accepted criteria that OED shares, specifically, relevance, quality of design, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. In addition, OED systematically included since 2010 gender mainstreaming for gender equality as a criterion in all evaluations. The criteria are rated using a six-point scale: Very poor—Poor—Inadequate/Unsatisfactory—Adequate/Satisfactory—Good—Excellent. The rationale for the scoring system and the definitions of the ratings can be found in Annex 2.

2 Relevance of the programme

The RFLP was assessed in terms of its relevance to (a) the participating governments’ fishery development strategies towards reducing poverty, (b) the needs of the beneficiary communities, (c) regional programme and donor strategies on the management of large marine ecosystems (LMEs), and (d) the advancement of country programme frameworks, FAO’s strategic objectives and the Code of Conduct on Responsible Fisheries.
The combination of a deteriorating resource base, increasing fishing pressure, conflicts of access, competition for coastal resources, scarce alternatives to fishing has posed a complex and tangled mix of biological, technical, economic, socio-cultural and political problems to governments. To these governance issues, the RFLP as it was conceptualized and designed is broadly relevant.

Coastal and offshore fisheries resources in the six programme countries and in South and Southeast Asia in general have long been determined as suffering from overexploitation; in the case of coastal fisheries, habitats that include the mangroves, coral reefs and sea-grass beds have been degraded. Livelihoods based on coastal fishery including, in many areas, the mangrove and coral reefs, are becoming less economically viable and unsustainable. But without viable alternatives, the fishers would continue to fish, increase harvest efforts on mangrove products, sail farther away, fish for longer hours and thus continue to deplete the fishery resources. This makes the livelihoods component of the programme a very relevant concern.

National RFLP project implementation supports national fisheries development plans (e.g. The Philippines Medium Term Fisheries Development and Management Plan, SRL’s National Fisheries Development Plan and specifically its livelihood development element, and Cambodia’s Strategic Planning Framework for Fisheries and more specifically the programme to organize, strengthen and provide technical advice to Community Fisheries). The country projects have a potential to provide information for the development or revision of policy (e.g. the Fishery Law of Vietnam, specifically its provisions on co-management). The RFLP also has the potential to support the mandate of governments to decentralize authority. Co-management activities include training local fisheries and government personnel in order to strengthen local institutions.

Results from co-management and livelihoods enhancement and diversification from the RFLP’s activities in VIE could be beneficial to the proposed World Bank project there, Coastal Resources for Sustainable Development, which gives strong emphasis on co-management as an approach. The project includes institutional capacity strengthening for sustainable coastal resources management and good practices for sustainable near-shore capture fisheries among its four components. RFLP VIE and the FAO Integrated Management of Lagoon Areas (IMOLA) project in fact had provided information during project proposal development.

However, the situation in TIM is an example where the assumptions and aims of the Project Document (ProDoc) may have been ahead of country realities. Although overfishing is a phenomenon in South Asia and South East Asia, according to the RFLP-TIM (TIM) it may not be case in the country’s northern waters. Shifting the communities dependent on this particular fishing ground away from marine capture does not align with the government’s aims; the RFLP-TIM is in fact supporting the government’s effort to increase sustainable fishing efforts in order to improve fisher livelihoods and increase fish supply to the markets and consumption—a part of the government’s strategy to improve food security and combat chronic malnutrition—while seeking to diversify livelihoods.5

5 In the other coastal areas, however, fishing grounds between the coast and reef, and especially the reefs, are already over-fished and subjected to destructive fishing, making resource management important.
Building the financial capital of small-scale fisher households to enable diversified and enhanced livelihoods that would move them out of poverty is among the important aims of the project component “facilitated access to microfinance services.” RFLP has established links between the beneficiaries and institutional microfinance services such as in PHI and SRL, with encouraging indications. On the other hand, in VIE and TIM, the MTE noted that the households were already borrowing small loans from quasi-government lending institutions, microfinance organizations, an NGO dedicated to providing microfinance services (in TIM), and informal lenders to support their fishing practice and other small alternative livelihood activities. Given the amount of capital needed to enable them to make a significant shift to alternative livelihoods which would lift SSFs out of poverty, the SSFs would need larger credit lines than are now available to them.

Similarly, there exist some shortcomings in the relevance of the RFLP’s Safety at Sea (SatS) output to the specific needs and livelihood situations of many of the beneficiary communities. The output might have addressed not only fisher accidents at sea, but also the consequences of these accidents for other household members on shore, and the occupational health and safety of others involved in fishing-related activities, such as fish vendors and processors, as the ProDoc itself suggests. And, the output is in fact worded as “Measures to improve safety at sea and reduce vulnerability for fishers and other community members.”

However, the SatS component in its ultimate formulation was restricted to the prevention of accidents, rescue operations and distribution of life vests and communications equipment, safety awareness, and boat design and safety. While in some communities the output clearly played a role in saving lives, the more limited approach taken was found to lack relevance to the fishing practices and needs of many of the participating communities because they fish in shallow waters and close to shore, experience relatively few accidents and as a result do not prioritize the intervention. In PHI the SatS output was of little relevance to SSF priorities, but the country team was adaptive and integrated SatS activities into a disaster risk reduction and management strategy to enhance disaster preparedness in coastal communities.

Regionally, the programme is relevant. Although most donors and environment and development organizations have prioritized trans-boundary issues such as unsustainable commercial fishing, water pollution and large-scale ecosystem conservation, the RFLP’s relevance to these regional LME conservation and development strategies lies in its being one of the few initiatives in South and Southeast Asia to adopt a regional, lesson-sharing approach to small-scale fisher livelihoods and their role in fisheries resource management. Integrating the RFLP approach would benefit the Coral Triangle Initiative, which includes INS, PHI and TIM, of which one of the objectives is to prevent fishers from fishing in marine protected areas. In this connection, it is already contributing to the Bay of Bengal LME programme’s policy advisory role to governments, as in SRL.

To the regional programmes of UNEP and UNDP, and to the UNDAF strategies of some of the participating countries, the contribution of RFLP is in providing information generated from small and poor fishing communities, the ground level information as it were, to address the LME concerns that include the health of coastal ecosystems, conservation of wetlands, pollution, fisheries refugia, and livelihood transitions. These are regional priorities in the work plans of UNEP and UNDP’s Asia Pacific Regional Programme. The management of LMEs involves a regional structure that has to deal with trans-boundary issues, but understanding and addressing these issues is often done through the establishment of
demonstration sites. These sites are large areas comprising numerous communities. In this context, the RFLP communities could be part of demonstration sites and add considerable value to the large ecosystems management programmes by showing a successful model of co-management. This would be useful information on small-scale fisheries and coastal resource management for UNEP’s Marine and Coastal Strategy, particularly the long term plan to improve marine and coastal environments and reduce human impact.\(^6\) A strategic partnership with these organizations, or at the very least, actively communicating and sharing the results of RFLP with them will provide benefit to a much wider area, more people, and contribute to the resolution of a wider set of issues in Southeast and South Asia.

32 The RFLP’s general aims are also reflected in the strategies, including the Country Programme Frameworks (where they exist) of the FAO country offices in the participating countries, and in the existing UNDAF and One UN strategies in the region that FAO shares with other UN agencies. Regarding FAO’s corporate aims, under Strategic Objective C they centre on measures to reduce global unsustainable fish catch and ensuring sustainable and efficient aquaculture through improved national and regional governance. But some recognition is given to the “co-existence” of the large- and small-scale capture sectors and the importance of fishing for the livelihoods of the latter. For the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), guidelines are presently being developed for small-scale fisheries, to which the RFLP has a potential to contribute. Overall, there are minor shortcomings to the relevance of the RFLP (on SatS and facilitating microfinance access in some countries or communities) and the rating on this criterion is **Good**.

3 Quality of Design

33 The donor’s interest, in the wake of the tsunami, was in supporting a programme to reduce the vulnerability of SSFs. Once it had identified the countries to be involved, the RAP in consultation with the various subject experts in the Fisheries Division of FAO headquarters decided upon the issues the RFLP would address and what the outputs would generally be.

34 When consultations with each of the selected countries were conducted, the intent was to formulate a detailed national/site plan for each of the outputs but not to introduce any changes to the outputs themselves. The absence of any deeper contextual assessment and more open discussion with the governments on their aims has been responsible in the end for some of the key hindrances to the programme’s effectiveness and efficiency, before the RFLP team was recruited and implementation began. It has also had consequences for the likelihood of the programme’s sustainability and ability to generate long-term impacts.

35 This entailed that during planning no adequate analysis was conducted of the policy, institutional, public finance, capacity and market contexts in the six countries, at the national, sub-national and community levels, to determine with government partners specifically what gaps and assets existed for achieving each of the outputs and what interventions the programme should undertake to add value with its comparative advantages and natural limitations. This was a central design weakness, with consequences on relevance and implementation.

The gap in identifying the most value-adding interventions was particularly true for co-management, which according to the MTE and as this section later explains, ought to have been placed at the centre of the RFLP’s strategy and serve as the framework for all other outputs. In VIE and CMB, for example, where the governments have pursued co-management under broad policies for decentralization, the legislation and regulations have lacked the necessary features that give community fisher groups real powers, rights, resources and incentives to manage their fishery resources on their own and for their own interests, and that detail what roles and responsibilities the sub-national and national entities will maintain to support these local groups. As a result, co-management in these countries has consisted to a large extent of the burden of resource protection and enforcement being shifted to local fisher groups, where these groups must simply follow certain procedures to legally adopt the task and accept particular fishing practices that higher-level government entities have already established. There is evidence that in INS and SRL the government’s co-management approach is not substantially different.

A strategic aim of the RFLP should have been to focus on addressing the deficits in the legislation on and concept of co-management in the countries in order to strengthen the decision-making and ownership of fishers, and the formulation of the output would have allowed the programme to work at both the government and community levels. In fact, during implementation, the RFLP held country workshops to define the policy “baselines”, and the documents indicate that the partner governments had some interest in identifying issues that the RFLP could work on strategically. Yet the policy analyses that emerged were insufficiently in-depth and too late to be employed. Most of all, the donor wanted its funds to go primarily to the communities, which actually limited how strategic and effective the RFLP could be. The absence of more targeted and useful co-management interventions developed with the government counterpart entities has essentially led, as the Effectiveness section discusses, to the RFLP finding its niche in carrying out the governments’ more limited agenda on co-management.

Accompanying the fact that the outputs were pre-selected without any country-level rationale, there were no needs assessments conducted in the selected communities to formulate well-tailored strategies for them. Only a very general regional background was presented in the ProDoc as applicable to all of the sites. One of the consequences of this was that during implementation the country teams had to utilize their limited time and resources to carry out studies for identifying community needs and strengths and feasible strategies for post-harvest processing and diversified livelihoods. Yet the quality of these techno-economic analyses too was often inadequate, with exception perhaps of PHI, which has led to poorly formulated interventions and weak outcomes. For some outputs, namely SatS, few if any needs assessments were carried out, meaning that supplies and training were provided irrespective of whether they were useful given local conditions. Although the national governments when approached at the end of the planning process on the whole accepted the full set of outputs, with some countries given less priority to some outputs (e.g. SatS in CMB), and they agreed to develop and pursue with the RFLP activities for each, this did not compensate for the lack of investment in determining the relevance of each output and the gaps and strengths in the countries for each output area to guide the RFLP’s strategies.

The RFLP has understandably not had control over the behaviour of its partner governments at their different levels to always ensure good delivery on the outputs, and a number of factors explain the degree of cooperation of a government counterpart. But where
the RFLP’s country activities were well-aligned with existing national or sub-national government fisheries and development strategies (even if this occurred only after the programme’s design) as in CMB with the Strategic Planning Framework for Fisheries, owing to the efforts of the country team, there has been a positive effect in terms of strengthening RFLP-government partner cooperation and the implementation of the outputs.

Another example of the benefits of harmonization with government entities is PHI, where livelihoods enhancement options are considered by the multi-agency Municipal Councils and the entity of the relevant ministry and are thus leading to better-formulated technical and financial feasibility assessments.

In contrast, in VIE where the strategic framework for fisheries has been less clear, there has been little joint planning with the provincial authorities on livelihoods diversification, and there has been weak clarity among the Provincial Management Units (PMUs) on how RFLP funds should, greater misinterpretation and some misdirection of the RFLP by the implementing entities has resulted. In several instances, funds have been poorly targeted with respect to addressing the needs of low-income small-scale fishers and in environmentally sustainable ways.

Finally, with respect to contextual analyses, little attention was devoted during the RFLP’s design to understanding what the level of knowledge and skills are in the government and other partner entities and whether they were in all areas sufficient for planning, achieving and monitoring interventions for the outputs to quality standards. More importantly, the planning and the strategies or outputs that were eventually developed do not reflect a serious consideration of how the RFLP’s work on the outputs would be sustained after the programme’s closure, and whether any institutions and systems in the countries would need strengthening to carry on the functions of the RFLP in the long-term. Government capacity at the sub-national level was found to be inadequate in several areas, and besides having implications for sustainability this has adversely impacted the cost-effectiveness of delivery on the outputs.

A second major form of constraint that the programme’s design created for the implementation team concerns the relationship among the five site-level outputs. If there is a core aim that emerges from the ProDoc, it is to diversify small-scale fishers’ livelihoods beyond dependence on declining coastal and marine resources in order to conserve these resources and improve fisher livelihoods. Accordingly, co-management ought to have been conceived as the central objective under which the other outputs, all generally for improving livelihoods, fell so that environmentally sustainable livelihood options would emerge from local, small-scale fisher institutions adequately managing their fishery resources. Instead, while some emphasis was placed on co-management the five outputs were regarded as different pathways to reduce SSF vulnerability, related but without any being truly dependent on another. A sense of how the outputs would together add up for a given community and from a livelihoods perspective to a larger outcome was missing.

Indeed, those involved in the RFLP’s design felt that the outputs should have been chosen for any single site only if they were important and feasible. The regional team stated that it was not necessary for all the outputs to be pursued at each site. While this has offered some needed flexibility and practicality for output implementation, and in many of the sites activities for only some of them have been implemented, an overarching framework that unites and integrate the outputs has been missing from the programme. The design fosters
the notion that the outputs could be pursued separately as ends in themselves rather than regarding them as interdependent. As the Effectiveness section below illustrates, the RFLP has indeed tended to implement the outputs as independent components even in communities where all of them were carried out.

More importantly, the components for livelihoods improvement and co-management for resource sustainability were not adequately integrated to ensure that improved livelihoods would not lead to or risk the communities using the fishery resources unsustainably, given the complexity of environment-development dynamics. Community co-management for sustaining fisheries resources ought to have also been the institutional process through which decisions were made on what alternative or diversified livelihoods to pursue.

The weak integration of the outputs, particularly among the livelihood-related ones, owes in part to their different nature in terms of being means, options or ends. While Output 4, enhanced and diversified livelihoods, is perhaps the broad end, the output on microfinance is only a possible source to finance livelihoods improvement strategies, and post-harvest processing and marketing and SatS are potential strategies.

With several and quite challenging outputs set as separate components, the RFLP’s design is ultimately overambitious. It is particularly so given the actual funding available per output in each country. Although the RFLP’s budget is nearly USD 20 million for four years, this amount distributed across the six countries, 10-15 communities and five site-level outputs, and accounting for country-team salaries, regional-team expenses, workshops and other events, is rather little to achieve any significant result anywhere. It was reported that each site receives very modest funds. Also, the duration ought to have been perhaps five years to show some impacts. The best the RFLP might hope for then is the development of a limited number of small-scale models to learn from for up-scaling and replication. Adding to this, the number of beneficiary communities selected per country, which the counterpart government agencies largely did, is too many for any major change to be accomplished in one of them. Finally, in some countries, such as TIM the sites chosen are too far apart and from the National Coordination Office (NCO) to allow for any significant engagement.

At the same time that the design is overambitious, it also fails to provide a clear idea of the specific outcome(s) to be reached for each output. The programme has only one very broad outcome for all five (broad) outputs. Indeed, a very basic problem with the ProDoc is the use of the term outputs rather than objectives for what is to be achieved, leaving the teams with little sense of the results to be accomplished and shifting their focus instead to the implementation of activities.

Coupled with the lack of objectives and outcomes, an M&E system integrating and aligning the different outputs was not developed for the programme at the initial stages. This would have aided in assessing achievement and learning and sharing lessons. A large-scale baseline survey of the entire community in all the participating sites was initiated shortly after implementation began, but was completed only recently thus limiting its use for its original purpose. While a log-frame with indicators is present in the ProDoc and was revised later, very little data has been collected on them, and it has been on outputs (e.g. number of training events), not outcomes. Nor were smaller-scale M&E systems developed at the start of strategies for post-harvest processing, other livelihoods schemes, or training on co-management for the purpose of assessing their performance. Such intervention-specific M&E plans certainly could have been created and the PMO could have required and provided
guidance for these. In fact, developing M&E plans for specific interventions would help the
country teams to formulate more fully their intervention strategies, their “results chains” and
the theories of change underlying them, which up to now has largely not been done. Up till
now, monitoring and reporting has been done almost only on tasks carried out.

50 The delay in M&E is explained in part by the recruitment of the PMO Information
Officer only in 2011. And, in the last year, the PMO has developed an Outcome Matrix to
help the country teams capture unintended and “downstream” positive effects from the
RFLP’s actions. While the idea is an innovative one in response to the emergence of
unexpected outcomes in complex environments, the tool needs to be further developed by
incorporating some standard and basic M&E concepts in it. Furthermore, there has been
scope in the last year for greater PMO support to the country teams on M&E and lesson-
learning, but as discussed in the next section, there has been greater emphasis placed on, and
a confusion of M&E with the collection of change stories for communications. In recent
months, the logframes of the countries have also been revised and intermediate outcomes and
indicators introduced. However, some question remains as to how meaningful they are to the
individual country teams to help them evaluate their work. Despite their being oriented to
their respective country contexts and strategies, the outcomes and indicators do not generally
assess the quality of outputs and outcomes. Promising in the near future is the Information
Officer’s plan to discuss with NPDs the kind of information they would find useful for policy
purposes and develop knowledge products based on this.

51 Regarding the risks to the programme identified in the ProDoc, these interestingly
revolve around the policy environment and conflicts between SSF and other stakeholders,
including commercial fishers. They were rated only medium or low. The mitigation
measures therefore consist of policy engagement or advocacy to address emerging issues and
conflict resolution. Worth noting, as the Effectiveness section discusses, is that risks like
these are indeed present and strong but the RFLP has not made a conscious effort to address
them, aside from the local efforts of some of the PCOs.
3.1 Management and Institutional Arrangements

3.1.1 RFLP Management Arrangements

52 The organizational structure originally proposed for the extended (regional and country) RFLP team was sound to some extent in that it included a Project Management Office (PMO) at the regional level based in RAP, made up a Project Manager and senior Technical Advisor (TA), a Project Coordination Office (PCO, or National Coordination Office, NCO) in each country composed of a National Project Coordinator (NPC) and a Communications and Reporting Officer. However, management of the outputs, particularly Output 6 for regional lesson-sharing, should have been better by placing more importance on obtaining or building M&E skills in the regional team, to complement those at the country level, rather than on only ensuring communications capacities.

53 Originally, the design did not include any additional experts on the country teams and the plan was to rely solely on counterpart government agencies as the implementing entities for the site-level outputs. While implementation by partner government agencies is common in FAO projects/programmes, the RFLP country-staff composition was rather optimistic given the large number of outputs to coordinate. The risk that government staff would not always possess the necessary skills for strong delivery of outcomes was also present. Even a rapid institutional and capacity assessment in the countries as a component of the contextual analysis for the RFLP’s design would have indicated that challenges could emerge from depending solely on government personnel, who have been mainly from the sub-national level. As the scale of the work and the delivery issues with some government staff were realized during implementation, long-term national consultants (NCs), generally one for each output, were brought into the PCO.

3.1.2 Institutional Arrangements with Government Partners

54 In each participating country, the relevant ministry for fisheries was to appoint for the RFLP the specific government implementing agency along with the National Director (ND) and NPDs from that agency. Generally, the agencies appointed have been appropriate. In VIE, however, the NPD and government entity chosen were not the most suitable match given the programme’s areas of emphases. The Research Institute on Aquaculture was selected whereas the RFLP team, some government staff and this evaluation felt a more appropriate entity would have been the Department of Fisheries Extension. (In January 2012 it was announced that the implementing agency will be changed to the Directorate of Fisheries.) While there are various factors that would explain the selection of the partner entity at the RFLP’s start, among them the reported lack of readiness of the Department of Fisheries Extension to take the role at the time, the lack of joint planning with the government of exactly how the RFLP would contribute seemed to have played a role in the choice of the agency.

55 In effect though, because the RFLP is operating at the community level and in most cases in the context of national decentralization agendas, the implementing agencies have actually been sub-national (provincial, cantonment and district) fisheries or agricultural and rural development departments, including a variety of different technical units. Letters of
Agreement (LOAs) as a means FAO employs to have government or non-government partners actually implement the work was available for the RFLP to use and the programme has done so extensively with the aim of strengthening the capacity of its government and other partners. These arrangements and modalities in terms of their design made sense overall though, as discussed under Effectiveness below, they have brought significant challenges to the RFLP during implementation. Regarding the LOA modality, the RFLP’s use of it would be normal. However, given that the RFLP’s stated outcome included strengthening the capacity of supporting institutions, LOAs were insufficient as a proposed means to meaningfully develop the necessary knowledge, skills and institutional systems.

At the national level in each country, a National Coordinating Committee (NCC), composed of the ND, NPD, implementing agencies, other concerned public institutions and the FAOR, was to be established “to facilitate a well integrated approach through good cooperation between different agencies.” It was proposed that the NCC meet semi-annually with the PMO and PCO. Above the NCCs lies the Project Steering Committee (PSC), formed out of the NPDs, PMO and donor. The PSC was envisioned to review progress, provide guidance and advice on programme orientation and implementation and facilitate shared learning between the participating countries. The governance arrangements planned with government partners were comprehensive and had the potential to offer solid and joint guidance, ownership and lesson-sharing. The performance of these institutions during implementation on the other hand has not met this potential, as the section on effectiveness discusses.

The overall rating for Quality of Design considering it various constituents elements assessed above is Inadequate/Unsatisfactory.

4 Efficiency

4.1 Budget and Expenditure

Programme implementation and progress were delayed for a variety of reasons, some that are understandable and others that might have been avoided. In several of the countries, the NPCs initially in place at the suggestion of the partner entities did not possess the requisite skills and little was accomplished under them. In response, the PMO did gradually replace them with capable staff. Additionally, in VIE the 2010 work plans the NCC approved early in the year could not be implemented because the government had not formally approved the body. Only by mid-2010 were all country work plans approved. Greater joint programme planning with the governments at design could have mitigated this delay. Finally, some time was required to familiarize PCO and government staff with FAO administrative procedures. Six months is reported to be common for FAO projects/programmes to start implementation, but the RFLP did not effectively begin it in all countries with appropriate staffing until the second half of 2010—or carried out a relatively small number of activities in its first year. This has meant it has been under implementation only a little over a year before the MTE.

Although the programme’s expenditure at this midpoint is roughly half the total original budget of USD 19,549,000 and the rate of delivery is now satisfactory, the cost-effectiveness or “return on investment” in terms of outcomes of the RFLP has been below
where it should be at this stage in the programme’s life. This has largely been due to the implementation of activities and the related spending occurring often without the necessary skills or planning to ensure results. It has also been because the limited resources have been spread too thin over several outputs and sites, raising the question whether all the investments were worthwhile. In response to the issue of weak government capacity and late delivery, a Budget Revision was made to increase the total budget by USD 96,615 to USD 19,645 for the hiring of NCs.

There have, however, been other reasons as well for the slow delivery. One, as mentioned earlier, was that as no analysis of the community contexts had been done before the RFLP began, the PCOs have had to devote their limited time for implementation on trying to understand what interventions they should pursue. Another has been the inordinate amount of time that LOA approval and procurement processes have taken, significantly delaying activities. Though developed to ensure quality outputs, build capacity and introduce standardization, FAO’s processes have contributed to inefficiency in the RFLP owing to their demand at times for minor details. Additionally, because of the USD economy in TIM and the scarcity of national capacity the ICs have had to be hired and the operational costs there have been much higher than elsewhere.

However, the structures of the RFLP’s management and that of the counterpart agencies, and the number stakeholders involved in approving an LOA/ procurement (PCO, PMO, implementing entity, ND and FAOR) account to a large degree for the problem. Adding to the bureaucracy has been the generation of a large number of separate LOAs when there has been a potential to combine them, where feasible and appropriate, for more efficiency.

Given the potential benefit of the LOA process in strengthening government capacity and providing country ownership of a programme, despite the frustrations it has experienced the RFLP has adopted the right approach in employing it - particularly since part of the programme’s outcome is the increased capacity of supporting institutions. At the same time, the capacity strengthening of sub-national government institutions in the RFLP has lacked a broader vision and developed plan, and as a result has not gone as far as it needs to. The implementation experience that sub-national staff have had has probably enhanced their knowledge to some degree, but owing to the often short duration of the official trainings conducted (e.g. one day) and other factors, there is little evidence that these trainings have improved their capacity significantly. Longer-term and more in-depth capacity-strengthening efforts, such as having government staff in TIM work with the PCO to gather and input fisheries census data into the country’s online database, are likely to have more significant results. The MTE considers that with some changes in procedure and strategy within the programme, efficiency could be improved by reducing the time LOAs and procurements take and the skills of government partners could be increased.

Where the RFLP might reduce its spending and allocate its funds to more core activities is on the rather high level of sponsorship for the travel and training of senior government staff regarding areas not closely related to the implementation of the programme. In the second half of 2011, the RFLP sponsored the travel of nearly 35 government officials to aquaculture workshops when aquaculture has not been a major livelihoods option the programme has pursued, would be challenging to introduce in the communities given the input factors involved, and could raise equity and sustainability issues. Given the ultimately limited funds of the RFLP, striving for strategic resource use will be critical.
4.2 Programme Management

Since the programme began, the Programme Manager and Technical Advisor (TA) have been active in responding to the various challenges to quality implementation on a day-to-day basis that have arisen, including the weak staff initially in the NPC positions, inappropriate counterpart agencies appointed, cooperation issues in some countries, and other issues. They have also devoted much of their time to maintaining relations with the NCCs of the six countries and visiting the PCOs. The TA fulfils the considerable task of providing technical inputs and clearance, appreciated by the PCOs, for all of their numerous activities, and the Programme Manager had a good intellectual vision of what the RFLP should achieve. Although the monitoring and reporting system has up till now gathered data only on the completion of activity work plans rather than on the achievement of outcomes, the PMO has generally followed-up on issues the reporting system has provided. In mid-2011, the PMO requested all the PCOs to develop an exit strategy for their work. Despite this occurring at the midpoint only of the programme, it was wise and not too early to ask for such a strategy, especially as the ProDoc does not contain one.

Where there is room for improvement is in providing greater and higher-level strategic direction to the PCOs by holding up for them the concept of integrated co-management and livelihoods development, challenging them on their strategies if necessary, and providing them with models, best-practices and guidelines, thus bringing greater coherence, effectiveness and efficiency to their efforts. The PMO did arrange for guidance to the PCOs on the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach towards the beginning of the programme. However, models and best-practices have also been needed on co-management, and on community needs assessments and feasibility studies during implementation. The regional team itself could have benefited from more focus in its support for the outputs at the national level. A certain lack of direction of the programme overall is seen particularly with regard to the livelihoods output. The progress reports and work plans reflect that a very large variety of highly different livelihood options have been entertained without significant prior consideration to what their scale, benefits and implementation challenges were likely to be, how options should be identified and choices among them made, or to what value the RFLP could provide. One of the results of this is that the RFLP is undertaking interventions that local NGOs are already implementing, but without the experience of these organizations. Owing to gaps in the M&E system, there was no data on the outcomes or relevance of the outputs, such as SatS, to help them prioritize or focus the programme’s work. There were opportunities, however, for the PMO to explore through country and site visits what the results, challenges and strengths were. The PMO might have also understood more deeply the different country contexts the PCOs have been working in, as well as supported them more on the concerns they raised, particularly those relating to their counterpart agencies.

Under situations with institutional, infrastructure and capacity challenges, the NPCs and their staff have displayed rather good management given the expectations made of them, and they also innovated and adapted their strategies in ways to have the RFLP bring more value to their respective countries than the programme design prescribed. From the countries visited, the CMB office has on co-management brought different stakeholders, i.e. local government fisheries entities, various communities and illegal fishers that have been in conflict with one another, into dialogues on co-management and enforcement. In TIM, the PCO discovered and promoted boat engine repair as a useful SatS and livelihoods measure,
and is seeking to have traditional resource conservation practices formalized in national legislation. The ability of innovations to emerge in VIE’s work may have been limited because of the significant investment the PCO must make in managing the institutional and administrative challenges in its relationship with the PMUs. Regional guidance though would still be highly useful as the PCOs could benefit from support on integrating the outputs, assessments and strategy development. Partner governments, strapped for resources, have tended to rely on the country programmes to meet aims not directly related to the RFLP. For example, the TIM programme is supporting the development of the NDFA’s Human Resources Development Strategy when this is not its comparative advantage, the activity is not linked closely enough with the RFLP aims, and it would add to the programme’s burden given the outputs it still needs to progress on.

67 PCO staff, however, have exhibited adequate skills and real interest in M&E, which would be appropriate for generating lessons. There has been a tendency for the PMO to prioritize change stories for communications. As a result, although the PMO has conducted several M&E workshops with the PCOs and backstopping missions, it has not had sufficient capacity in M&E to adequately guide and develop the skills of the country teams. PCOs have also reportedly been provided with additional budget for M&E to design their own systems, and in PHI for example an advanced system is being designed. The PCOs though remain obliged to follow the monitoring and reporting system and logframes that have been established. Another reason for the lack of M&E data to influence management has been the institutional arrangement for it in place with the partner governments; in VIE and CMB, the partner entities gather the data, but do not yet possess the skills to gather data on and assess outcomes. In both countries and TIM, PCO M&E staff visit the field as well though the visits are not regular, systematic and frequent. In VIE, they are constrained by the need for field-visit authorizations from the PMUs long in advance, and in all, as mentioned earlier, are asked to comply with PMO reporting systems. Like many other projects, the M&E staff also have little or no opportunity to be closely involved in strategic planning for the outputs, to check the quality of interventions and make the M&E system meaningful to those implementing the strategies.

4.3 Technical Backstopping

68 The nature of PMO technical backstopping to the PCOs has been discussed to an extent above, in the context of other issues. Generally, while the attentiveness and quality of the backstopping on activity-specific details have been strong, it would be more productive and efficient for both the PMO and the PCOs if the former were to shift towards providing guidance on the broad strategies of the latter, and arrangements for the technical clearance of activities and procurements were devised to make them less time-intensive. LoAs are already being grouped to better streamline the approval process.

69 With respect to providing technical guidance and vision for the programme, there is some lack of clarity on the role of the RAP fisheries Senior Officer in the RFLP, who is also the Lead Technical Officer (LTO) and the Secretary of APFIC through which the RFLP seeks to disseminate its lessons. The PMO engages the LTO on a daily basis on a wide range of issues relating to operations, implementation, working with FAORs, best-practices, norms and standards, and FAO procedures and policies. The LTO also clears all programme reports and technical documents. Having played a key role in the design of the RFLP, the LTO
remains keenly interested in the programme. At the same time, the RFLP possesses a TA, but one who has become burdened a great deal with managerial issues.

70 The RFLP also has a Task Force (TF) comprised of FAO staff in different offices and divisions. At the request of the ADG RAP, the TF was nominated by the Fisheries Department in 2008 for the programme preparation process, and its members have expertise in key issues that the RFLP addresses. The relationship between the programme and the TF can be characterized as ad hoc, as TF members, on the whole, were little involved in the RFLP’s design and have not been asked to provide much input during implementation, except on specific issues, such as post-harvest processing or legal ones, when requested. The low engagement of the TF has in some cases, also been the responsibility of the members; for lack of time they have not sought involvement. That the expertise of the TF has not been systematically brought into the RFLP, and from the design stage, has probably been a detriment to the programme, particularly on co-management. The RFLP would have likely benefited from the knowledge and experience in the TF on co-management legislation in the region, particularly CMB, and the guidance material on co-management available, and may as a result have targeted much earlier the legislative gaps responsible for the overly-prescriptive frameworks in the countries as issues to address in the programme. Guidance could also have been provided to better incorporate sustainable fisheries use in co-management, i.e. the ecosystem approach to fisheries, to counter the trend of seeing co-management as more or less just a participatory approach to management.

71 The FAO country offices act to clear contracts and transfer funds to the partner government in the country. In this role, they have had the potential to assist the programme as one that is relevant to their respective country priorities and to regional issues with its particular challenges at the national level. Such assistance could be particularly helpful regarding challenges relating to decentralization and what institutional arrangements and legal framework would bestow genuine community management, and how FAO programmes could best partner with the government to give country ownership while achieving results. Where governments have adopted broad, national decentralization policies that affect all agriculture-related sectors, FAORs could be in a position to facilitate discussions for identifying where common challenges lie and sharing lessons across sectors on the solutions adopted. The FAO offices have responded to requests for support from the RFLP on specific administrative issues, though could have been more active and strategic in assisting this initiative with the possibility of being up-scaled in their respective countries in the future.

4.4 Government Support

72 Participating governments agreed to contribute to the RFLP through staff time and office space and overall showed significant interest in the programme by largely selecting the sites including their number and location, by appointing particular individuals as NPCs, and by asking the programme to carry out initiatives only marginally related to the RFLP thrust.

73 This level of interest and ownership may not have been to the best benefit of the programme, as it happened in VIE where the Research Institute for Aquaculture was not the most appropriate one, or in TIM, where the NDFA has received the RFLP’s support for the development of a human resources development strategy and a national aquaculture plan. In fact, the issue of aquaculture appears to be a recurrent one: the PMUs have sought to use the programme’s funds at times for purposes such as promoting aquaculture in the sites that in
terms of environmental sustainability and equity would not be the best choice. Finally, the results and the chances for programme sustainability might be greater had the governments provided counterpart funding at inception.

74 At the same time, the governments seem to have acknowledged the importance of RFLP in particular as a good opportunity for strengthening the capacity of their staff at different levels. Furthermore, in general NPDs have provided strong support to the RFLP. There will reportedly be some up-scaling of models for accident reporting in CMB and INS, though the MTE did not see budget commitments. And, in PHI BFAR took the technical advice of the RFLP and adopted a moratorium on sardine fishing, as well as recently committed to providing co-funding for RFLP’s work there. Proven models to adopt at larger scales in co-management and livelihoods diversification have not yet been developed. Based on the RFLP’s cost-effectiveness, including its delays, challenges with the LOA process and particular spending decisions, the programme’s management, including its strategic guidance and skills, the technical backstopping and the nature of government support, the efficiency of the programme is rated overall as Inadequate/Unsatisfactory to Adequate/Satisfactory.

5 Effectiveness

75 Given the wide diversity of the national contexts as well as the number of programme interventions in each country, it is not possible for the MTE to assess all the activities in each country. The main focus of this section is on three countries visited, CMB, TIM and VIE, and the report draws supplementary information from the other three countries.

76 The programme has six outputs, with five of them implemented in the partner countries while the sixth – relating to sharing of information – is regional in nature. The five programme outputs are replicated in all national log-frames, but the work plans for each country do not necessarily follow all the activities suggested in the regional log-frame. Consequently, there is much diversity among the activities in the countries. The MTE focused on the revised regional log-frame to assess the performance of the outputs across the countries. The challenge in evaluating the progress on the outputs is compounded by inadequacies in the M&E system in capturing outcomes and emerging impacts, and the fact that the reporting system for each country does not provide elaboration on the nature, scope, process, learning and outcomes of the different interventions. Up till the present, the monitoring and progress reporting done has been almost wholly of activities implemented, and the absence of any M&E systems that assess outcomes or impacts has made it difficult to know and learn lessons regarding the successes of the different strategies. This has constituted a shortcoming particularly for Output 6, the regional sharing of lessons, where few, if any, real lessons from experience have been formally gathered and shared internally or with other organizations and programmes.

5.1 Output 1: Establishment of co-management mechanisms for sustainable utilization of fishery resources supported

77 The RFLP aims to both improve the livelihoods of SSFs and reduce the decline and dependence of coastal communities on fisheries resources. As a result, the MTE found
Output 1 to be a critical output for the programme, as it attempts to address fisheries management objectives through co-management by the resource users, thus raising the issue of livelihoods development of the participating communities.

78 The expected Intermediate Outcome (according to the revised log-frame) for the output is: “Communities and government establish and support co-management mechanisms for sustainable utilization of fish resources”, and the country teams are to do this through the log-frame activities below, adapted and selectively applied to their contexts:

- Fisheries information bases improved
- Amendment of national policies and local regulations supported
- Registration of fishing boats improved
- Stakeholder organizations strengthened
- Officials/community members trained in co-management
- Development/implementation of fisheries management plans supported
- Improved habitat management practices supported
- Participatory enforcement mechanisms strengthened
- Participatory management monitoring developed/introduced

79 In the absence of more specific outcomes for the output in the logframe, this section evaluates the effectiveness of the output in terms of its performance in achieving what might be the two components of the Intermediate Outcome, i.e. 1) Assistance to the governments; and 2) Assistance to the communities to establish co-management mechanisms for sustainable utilization of fish resources.

5.1.1 Assistance to the governments

80 Most of the RFLP countries have developed and implemented co-management policies and are supporting communities to participate in the process. For the RFLP, this provided a good entry point and opportunity to strengthen co-management. Furthermore, much of the RFLP’s efforts have been invested in Output 1. The question for the programme might therefore have been how it could best assist the governments and communities in the countries.

81 The RFLP has undertaken a range of activities relating to improve the capacity of the partner government staff on co-management. Staff at the national, provincial and local levels in the fisheries administrations have attended trainings, workshops and exposure visits, and been the recipients of publications and awareness raising material. Interviews with sub-national staff indicate that their knowledge on fisheries management has increased.

82 The content of the training has been mostly on fisheries management, covering topics such as resource survey methodologies, ecosystem restoration, and marine biology and ecology. It has not placed much emphasis on the institutional aspects of CM to promote more participatory and equitable processes or on SSF livelihoods and the impact of sustainable resource management on them. Although the RFLP has aimed to build the capacity of its partner institutions, to a great extent through the LOA process that allows these entities to implement some of the programme’s work, there has not been much explicit “strengthening of stakeholder organizations” in co-management per se. The extent to which the philosophy of co-management has percolated into the institutional culture of the government departments does not seem to be great, and the prevalence of decision-making from higher levels within
the partner government agencies acts against the stated intentions to promote participatory co-management. The capacity of the partner institutions in supporting co-management remains to be developed. There are also the issues of the sustainability and longer-term impact of the capacity-building efforts: given that mostly middle- and lower-level staff have been involved in activity implementation, the extent to which they can contribute to and influence provincial or national policies remains uncertain.

83 The RFLP has carried out some steps under “fisheries information bases improved”, to build databases for effective fisheries management. In TIM and CMB, pilot data collection systems on fish landings have been established. However, considering the scale at which data must be gathered to generate meaningful findings the small scale of the RFLP initiatives (5 landing sites in each country, covering one boat per fishing-practice in each location) is not really justified in terms of building government capacity. Also, few steps under this activity were taken. It may have been more strategic for the RFLP to have collaborated with an existing national agency with the role of fisheries monitoring. In CMB, however, it has been reported that the government is interested in scaling up the activity along the entire coastline with RFLP support.

84 In TIM and INS, the PCOs are also supporting the partner agencies in registering and licensing fishing boats, and from a fisheries management perspective the activity has significant positive implications assuming the governments wish to keep the databases updated. The activities have also been doable in terms of the RFLP’s time and funding requirements.

5.1.2 The co-management capacity of fishing communities

85 The key RFLP activity to help the fishing communities take part in the CM process has been training. An entire activity line, “community members trained in co-management”, exists. This training has been regarded as preparatory work to assist SSF groups in becoming formal, legally recognized institutions under the government’s co-management framework and to obtain license or rights to community fishing zones (CFZs). To become legal organizations SSF groups in CMB and VIE are required to develop and submit fisheries management plans for approval.

86 Yet a review of RFLP progress reports for 2011 reveals that there were no trainings or workshops specifically on the concept and institutional aspects of co-management for the communities in any of the countries– except for CMB. Yet even there, as with government staff training, the emphasis has been on fisheries resource management, including fisheries legislation, coastal fisheries and resource management, illegal fishing and conservation of sensitive habitats, and MPAs. In CMB, three courses of one day each on (i) fisheries legislation, (ii) marine biology and ecology, illegal fishing and its negative impacts, and (iii) gender concepts, were delivered to all fifteen Community Fisheries (CFis) over a 45-day period in 2011. Interviews with community members revealed only a weak understanding on their part of these subjects, each of which would take a long time to learn and apply well.

87 The RFLP has undertaken a range of activities regarding institutional arrangements and strengthening, but in terms of capacity in the fishing communities on co-management the results have not been substantial. With regard to the activities constituting a strong, coherent and viable institutional strengthening component, there is room for improvement. There were
also no activities implemented to address issues relating to institutional arrangements and strengthening, such as membership, property rights, social preparation, financial and political support, besides clear management, enforcement and monitoring mechanisms.\footnote{Robert S. Pomeroy, Brenda M. Katon, Ingvild Harkes, 2001. Conditions affecting the success of fisheries co-management: lessons from Asia, \textit{Marine Policy} 25 (2001) 197–208}

88 The tendency of the RFLP then has been to put more emphasis on fisheries management, where local communities have a role of simply assisting the management, than on co-management, where SSFs are brought into more meaningful participation and their knowledge, ideas and needs are tapped to become equal partners in decision-making on the resources. The shortcomings of the programme in promoting community capacity for it are reflected in part in the vague concept of CM that the MTE found SSF group members in the RFLP sites to have.

89 TIM is somewhat of an exception in that the PCO is working on a co-management model based on traditional resource governance systems (Tarabandu), and is documenting the customary laws and practices with a view to seek formal recognition for them from the State. Yet SSFs in the cooperatives at the community level in the RFLP sites also display little self-management of their groups, ownership of any sustainability agenda or awareness of their practices on the fishery resources.

90 The lack of real SSF ownership of CM in VIE and CMB is due largely to the fact that the national CM frameworks there have not devolved genuine authority and resources to them and refinements remain to be made in the policies, legislation and regulations at the different levels. The RFLP brings some value in working directly with SSF groups, but would likely have contributed more had the RFLP also addressed the gaps in CM policies. The RFLP appears to have considered the amendment of policies and regulations to fall within its scope to some degree, based on some of its actions. Output 1 as phrased does not preclude policy-level work even though AECID has wished for its funds to go largely to the communities. In fact, one of the first activities undertaken in implementation was the analysis of the countries’ co-management policies.

91 Under the activity, “amendment of national policies and local regulations supported”, the RFLP undertook reviews of national fisheries and aquaculture policies, with co-management as a focus. The reviews, of varying quality across the countries, were a valuable output for: (i) the RFLP to understand the scope and likely sustainability of its work in each country, and (ii) the governments to identify the areas for improvement in their fisheries policies and laws. It was rather a loss for the programme that these assessments were not done at the design stage to plan the RFLP’s interventions. Some efforts to revise co-management related policies and regulations have been conducted in INS and SRL, and in INS by mid-2011 a draft local regulation on fisheries was finalized for provincial government endorsement. According to the PMO, the RFLP in SRL also provided technical assistance for a major revision to co-management policy and for new legislation to mobilize stakeholders for ecosystem-based fisheries management. However, no further information could be found in the programme documents on this.

92 Similarly, in VIE, in two provinces, Thua Thien Hue (TTH) and Quang Tri, the provincial authorities initiated a process to identify and address existing weaknesses in the
relevant legislation with the participation of the RFLP, and by end-2011 TTH had produced a draft report on the revisions and Quang Tri a provincial-level co-management regulation was developed. However, in the case of INS, SRL and VIE, RFLP documents do not make it clear what contribution the programme made and what improvements the regulations or policies bring to co-management. A clear indication that the RFLP’s efforts were a conscious follow up on the policy baseline studies is lacking as the studies generally do not contain a detailed analysis of the policies and regulations. There was scope for improving the quality of the analyses, especially in relation to co-management, for encouraging their uptake within RFLP and with partner governments.

In its work to formalize the SSF CM institutions, the RFLP has essentially implemented the more restricted national agendas for fisheries resource management and for decentralization, where CM is defined by the government and has consisted of a transfer of the burden of resource protection to the local level. In CMB, government rules cover every aspect of the Community Fisheries’ (CFis) structure and functioning, and national guidelines include model by-laws, internal rules and area agreements that must be included in the Area Management Plans for the groups to be recognized.

Similar requirements for Fisheries Association (FA) recognition exist for FAs in VIE, and SSF members of FAs interviewed there basically stated that they were going through the process of recognition because the provincial government had required them to do so. In the sense that the RFLP has supported the development of the targeted CFis and FAs in CMB and VIE, respectively, it has achieved a lot. But the CM groups lack the necessary self-management.

Without a strategic approach, the RFLP’s added value on co-management is currently considered by the government and the community respondents to be essentially speeding up processes that could have occurred in the communities anyway. As evidence, they indicate that some of the FAs and CFi’s in the neighbourhood of the RFLP-supported communities work no less effectively than the targeted groups. Given that the establishment of a good co-management system takes a considerable number of years, it is especially important that the RFLP uses its opportunity to establish strong CM foundations.

Hence while the evaluation overall found that the RFLP has contributed by helping to legally integrate its selected communities into their respective national co-management frameworks, it has essentially followed and helped implement these imperfect government agendas rather than seeking to address them.

The CM planning, zoning and patrolling supported have also not addressed the underlying dynamics and stakeholder actions behind unsustainable use, as seen in the approaches the communities are taking in CMB to “illegal” fishing by outsiders and their own practice of potentially destructive methods. To conduct the activities of improving habitat management practices and strengthen participatory enforcement mechanisms, the RFLP has focused on controlling illegal fishing in Community Fishing Zones (CFZs) through setting concrete poles to demarcate CFZs and conservation areas for sensitive habitats, artificial reefs for these areas, and providing MCS equipment and patrol boats.

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8 A substantial literature review suggests that co-management systems typically take from six to 12 years to bring to full functionality.
The PCO succeeded in providing the material or is in the process of doing so. However, in its actions it has helped define “co-management” as excluding other resource users from CFZs, and being excluded from their areas. What is interesting is that SSF CFi members readily admit that they themselves fish outside their CFZs, suggesting that the CFZ-based area management regimes in a region are not quite relevant to their respective communities or to external users. These users have included more affluent society members who are also owners of trawlers and other destructive fishing gear, and other communities.

An important omission of the RFLP in the beginning of its CM work then was a detailed analysis of the various stakeholders involved in fisheries in the areas to influence the CM frameworks and to bring the stakeholders into a dialogue for more meaningful CM. Such an analysis should also include land-based small-scale fisheries stakeholders, such as processors and traders, women, who are also active fishers, and the poor.

The protection measures taken have been effective to some extent and give communities a sense of custodianship over their CFZs. But some of the technologies, namely concrete poles, are symbolic in part because they are placed too far apart to keep boats outside. The artificial reefs installed have been effective in destroying the push nets of illegal fishers (more than ten) and have likely enhanced fish stocks as well. It should be noted, however, that their ability to increase fish stocks could provide a disincentive for CFis (and the RFLP) to address the communities’ “legal” but harmful fishing practices.

However, the CMB PCO has adapted the CM output to address local needs and is engaging many of these stakeholders. In this way it is bringing an important contribution. In an environment and history characterized by conflict and animosity between SSF communities and with trawlers on fishing, and between the communities and sub-national government agencies on enforcement responsibilities, the PCO has brought some of these actors together into discussion on the issues possibly for the first time to address them. In this complex context, the PCO may have to use the conventional protection and exclusion approach to reduce tensions among the groups before finding more meaningful ones to the livelihoods resource use and conservation issues.

The low awareness of or buy-in for CM is reflected not only in CFi members fishing in other areas, but also in their potentially overfishing in their own areas. Fishing gear that is used, such as fine-mesh nets for Acetes shrimp (krill), could be destructive to fisheries resources and SSFs even tacitly acknowledge this. But they justify it on the grounds that according to the government’s by-laws they are not illegal. In fact, overfishing does not figure at all as an issue in the CM thinking in any of the countries. The local fishing fleets in CMB are reportedly increasing, and in VIE too SSFs are shifting to higher engine powers and more intensive fishing. Based on other trends in the region, it is possible that this is in response to declining catches rather than to efficacy of the management system. Yet there have been no RFLP activities under the CM output to curb overfishing by SSFs in co-management institutions.

On patrolling and enforcement, activities have been limited. In this area as well the RFLP has essentially accepted the governments’ apparent agenda of shifting the burden to SSF groups without providing resources or defining a role the government still needs to play in the activity. The RFLP is supporting patrolling by the communities through providing boats and MCS equipment. But these costs are high and the continuation and long-term
sustainability of the activity is uncertain given the lack of resources for petrol. Patrolling as a result is not occurring regularly in many communities.

104 The broad-scale enforcement measure in TIM, where the NDFA and Maritime Police would jointly tackle illegal fishing, while it would bring a contribution to the country, is not quite relevant for CM.

105 The RFLP could also have been more strategic if it identified the government entity at the national or sub-national level that could do patrolling and enforcement more efficiently and at a larger scale. Given the lack of resources for community patrolling, according to the lagoon fishers of Quang Loi commune, VIE, they are to receive a fish aggregating device for use in the buffer zone of the protected area so that they may be able to generate revenues for this purpose. The PMO has apparently not heard of this proposal, but from a fisheries management perspective it would not be a very sound one for sustainable management.

106 In fact a central concern with the CM work is that the RFLP’s support for income-generation schemes and diversified livelihoods is not integrated with it, and as a result some alternative livelihoods schemes, as the section on Output 4 discusses, have the potential to negatively affect fishery resources. Given the complexity of environment-livelihoods interactions and the RFLP’s aim for resource sustainability, CM needs to be positioned as the central, framework-setting output in the RFLP’s strategy, with respect to which the others are pursued. The PHI model for the RFLP actually does this to a large extent and can serve as an example for the other country teams to learn from. But for co-management institutions to ensure environmentally sustainable livelihoods SSFs in them must have the capacity to understand the impacts of their own practices on the natural resources and the willingness to mitigate them. To reach for this aim, the RFLP might bring in experiences and lessons on co-management from outside to enhance its work as thus far there is little evidence that they have been used.

5.1.3 The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) in the RFLP

107 There is good awareness about the CCRF in the PMO, but the Code has not served as the basis for any of the RFLP’s actions. The MTE did not find any activities within the countries visited that drew specifically upon it, but this is in part due to the nature of the Code itself. Given the rather intangible nature of the Code, its importance may lie more in its being a checklist of sorts to assess any proposed activity under the RFLP. The question then would not be about what activities have been implemented based on the Code, but which ones have ignored or overlooked its provisions. From this inverse perspective, given that some of the RFLP’s interventions could very likely run against the fisheries management objective, of both the RFLP and the CCRF (the latter of which advises the application of precautionary principles and ecosystem approaches to prevent such eventualities), the programme might be considered as not having followed the CCRF.

5.2 Output 2: Measures to improve safety at sea and reduce vulnerability for fishers and other community members

108 The ProDoc identifies a range of conditions to which SSF communities are vulnerable, including weak human and physical resources, lack of institutional frameworks,
poor social welfare security nets and occupational health issues at sea and on shore. Together, these factors link sea/occupational safety to livelihoods and offer to guide the RFLP to make appropriate interventions for wider adoption in the future. But the RFLP’s activities focused on a far narrower scope, limiting the interventions to conventional and mechanistic safety-at-sea activities (with the exception of PHI) and thus and losing sight of the original concept of a holistic, livelihoods-focused approach.

The following activities were suggested for the output:

- Accidents and their causes assessed
- Stakeholders’ awareness of dangers and hazards created
- Fishers, boat builders, inspectors in fishing boat safety trained
- Disaster preparedness in coastal communities enhanced
- Guidelines/regulations for boat construction/safety equipment developed, published and disseminated
- Communication systems designed, tested and locally applied
- Early warning systems designed, tested and locally applied

The programme concentrated on providing training and equipment (life vests, communication equipment, etc.) for the safety of SSFs against accidents at sea above improving their health and safety or those of others in the fishing trade, at sea or on-shore, in other ways. Yet because many of the communities fish in shallow waters and close to shore, and experience few accidents the equipment, training and accident reporting systems developed have not benefited them much. Interviews with SSFs clearly indicate that the life jackets are rarely – if at all – used. Why they were procured and distributed in such large numbers is unclear.

In VIE, some communities did benefit from the equipment and training, reporting a reduction in accidents. But communication technologies will also be used to increase fish capture, which does not promote sustainability and calls for CM controls. The output was also adapted innovatively to better suit local needs. In PHI, accident reporting was designed to meet disaster management needs. In TIM, engine repair training was introduced, is appreciated among SSFs, and has provided livelihoods benefits by saving repair costs.

**Accidents and their causes assessed:** In TIM, CMB and INS, trainings were provided to field data collectors on accident reporting and a national accident database was set up in TIM. The accident reporting systems in the countries were pilots of a system FAO’s FIRO (of the Fisheries Division) developed, embodied in “FAO Guidelines to Competent Authorities in Implementing an Accident Reporting and Analysis System for Small Fishing Vessels”, under a global SatS programme for SSFs. The data from the pilot-testing will be used to finalize the Guidelines. However, according to the data collected and interviews with SSFs in the beneficiary communities, the number of accidents is not significant enough for them to be a concern to the fishers. They experience relatively few accidents at sea, and in a majority of cases SSFs do not fish in deep waters or at great distances from shore. In CMB, there were also difficulties experienced with the FIRO model as it was regarded as too complex.

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9 As reviews of several post-tsunami rehabilitation programmes in the region have demonstrated, the lack of livelihood-focus in the disaster relief, preparedness and mitigation programmes has meant that most communities continue to remain as vulnerable to future disasters as before.
In TIM, the system remains a contribution to the country given its low capacity for developing one on its own, and hopefully it will be continued by the government. But elsewhere, given the costs of creating such systems, the RFLP might instead shift instead to encouraging the partner governments to create them. In SRL, the PCO conducted a national workshop to discuss the possibility of developing a national accident reporting system and negotiating with the government to follow up on the recommendations.

**Stakeholders’ awareness of dangers and hazards created:** This largely consisted of a number of training programmes, awareness campaigns and media material. The trainings focused on: existing regulations on SatS, basic sea safety, navigation and seamanship, and boat master training. The Boat Master’s training in Vietnam was reported to have helped the fishers to obtain work on fishing vessels outside the area, which makes it a good livelihood diversification strategy. The campaigns and media material seemed to have little influence on the communities since they have only recently been developed and delivered.

**Fishers, boat builders, inspectors in fishing boat safety trained:** This activity led to better results as it was more linked to SSF needs. It focused on training fishers, fisheries officers and boat builders on quality issues in boat construction, engine repair and maintenance issues in different countries. A concern is that much of the training in PHI and SRL was only of 1-2 days each, hardly sufficient for the technical issues involved. In TIM, this activity is showing very positive results. The trainings for the partner government staff focused on boat construction, boat and engine repair and maintenance. The training also included options to modify and improve government-supplied boats that have design flaws.

The PCO also delivered a number of hands-on trainings on basic engine maintenance. Given that engine repairs are a major cause of loss of fishing days as well as a major drain on incomes, the fishers took to the trainings very quickly and many are now able to undertake minor repairs on their own. The PCO intends to conduct more advanced training for fishers in 2012, which should bring significant benefits. The use of NDFA staff for the training could make this a self-sustaining activity.10

However, the fishers’ ability to do repairs is constrained by the lack of access to spare parts, which the PCO is now addressing. For Cambodian fishers, the lack of local boat-building facilities and low investment capacity are constraints for making better use of the training. The RFLP should have looked beyond the training needs and ensured support for the uptake of the knowledge.

The MTE suggests that the RFLP focus on this activity if it is to continue working on Output 2. It would also make sense to move this activity to the livelihood enhancement and diversification output and expand its scope if the opportunity arises, to include the optimization of fishing operations in other ways, such as through training youth in boat construction and engine repair/maintenance.

**Disaster preparedness in coastal communities enhanced:** Most of the work under this activity is confined to PHI, while VIE undertook a few activities as well. In PHI, an extensive review was done about the existing mitigation strategies and needs, the level of

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10 The only trouble appears to be that the mobile repair van that was to help the NDFA staff to undertake the field visits is itself reported to be ‘under repair’.
awareness amongst key stakeholders, and the gaps in existing programmes. Alongside, an assessment of the existing disaster communication systems and of the investments required to strengthen the early warning systems was also implemented. A number of consultation meetings and field visits were undertaken to cover a wide range of stakeholders, which raised a range of major concerns in this area. Training was undertaken focused on disaster risk reduction and management and establishment of early warning systems, which was followed up with orientation, rapid assessment and multi-stakeholders planning workshops.

120 In Vietnam, the disaster preparedness process comprised of one-day training courses on disaster preparedness followed up with consultation workshops with local authorities and FAs to discuss disaster preparedness within the FAs. This led to the formation of two disaster response groups, for which draft operation guidelines were developed. These groups will also receive safety, rescue and first-aid training in 2012.

121 The Philippines approach is important for RFLP in that it expands the scope of this output to cover a wider range of pertinent issues. The model – of developing a comprehensive understanding of the prevailing situation prior to implementing the activities – also has a number of benefits for the RFLP in that: (i) it is within the project’s means to develop, (ii) it builds upon the prevailing situation to develop intervention guidance, (iii) it directly informs RFLP’s initiatives and (iv) it would be a good database and policy guidance for all future interventions. However, at a fundamental level, the disaster risk reduction activity follows a largely conventional course that is already well developed in most countries, giving rise to questions as to the specific value-added from RFLP’s intervention in the area. Given the pilot-scale nature of its intervention, RFLP needs to reflect on what additional advantage can be gained from its involvement in an already well developed area.

122 The MTE’s contention here is that, if RFLP must work on this output, then PHI route is the most feasible one to follow. On the other hand, if the rationale for the whole output is to be addressed the issue of value addition becomes important.

123 Guidelines/regulations for boat construction/safety equipment developed, published and disseminated: Little work seems to have gone into this activity in all countries. The trainings certainly addressed the issue to some extent, covering the existing guidelines for construction and safety equipment in countries like CMB. Here, the improved boat building process was documented on video for dissemination and also led to the development of an illustrated manual on improved boat construction. Given that the RFLP is only midway through its life, the absence of much work under this activity is probably to be expected. However, attempts to collate and consolidate global best-practices in this area (including FAO’s own work) would need to be harnessed to assess their applicability to the local context so as to refine and develop it into an RFLP output eventually.

124 Communication systems designed, tested and locally applied; Early warning systems designed, tested and locally applied: Together, these two activities were consolidated into one, referred to as ‘donation of basic safety equipment.’ It is not clear though how the needs were assessed and the numbers of equipment to be provided were arrived at. In the case of some equipment, there were too few distributed to cover all the fishers in the community.

125 The maintenance and appropriateness of some of the equipment for SSFs to benefit from it arises as an issue. Fishing villages are rather remote and have no local facilities for the purpose, and repairs could be expensive. The mobile phones provided in VIE for SSF
communication with the shore are not likely to work as fishing occurs mostly out of mobile phone range. Simpler, more reliable mechanisms like using local radio to transmit weather forecasts at regular intervals, and encouraging fishers to carry transistor radios seem to have been overlooked.

126 The equipment can also have adverse consequences for fisheries resource sustainability. SSFs consider the phones to be most useful for sharing news of good fishing grounds within the near-shore areas to other boats, so the potential for more intensive fishing in certain areas has actually increased.

127 In no country were occupational safety issues addressed, which would cover a range of other, shore-based, stakeholders. These would have covered working conditions onboard and on shore, health implications of life at sea and migration (including HIV and AIDS), and implications of seasonality on health of the coastal communities, and would have more firmly linked this output to the broader aim of livelihood improvement. Similarly, social welfare and insurance issues – vital to addressing vulnerability especially of the household – received little attention. Little coverage of people other than the active fishers in the training programmes. The exclusion of shore-based fish-workers – traders and processors – may have been justified on account of the trainings’ focus on sea-safety. But in SRL, it has been reported that ‘participation of women was relatively small [21 out of 852] since these programmes are not directly relevant to women’. Given RFLP’s aims of raising awareness about sea safety at the fishers’ household level, this is a rather strange exclusion.\(^{11}\)

5.3 **Output 3: Measures for improved quality of fishery products and market chains to reduce health hazards and add value**

128 The suggested activities under this output are:
- Public awareness of food safety issues enhanced
- Fishers trained in fish handling, processing, and business management
- Improved management of landing centers
- Pilot operations for value added products and marketing
- Improved market information

129 The outcome for this output is: Communities and government introduce and promote measures for improved quality of fishery products and market chains. The activities are assessed in terms of how much they have contributed to the ability of the (i) governments and (ii) the communities to take measures for improvements in (iii) quality of fishery products and (iv) market supply chains.

130 Given the complex nature of the post-harvest processing and marketing sector, the PCOs would have benefited from conducting detailed Post-Harvest Overviews (PHOs), including supply chain analyses, within the targeted areas. PHOs are a tested means of assessing the overall post-harvest and market context from a livelihoods perspective, existing systems and players, their respective strengths and weaknesses, and the scope for interventions. PHOs have in fact been done in the past for CMB and SRL. But only the PHI

\(^{11}\) Interestingly, in the next report from Sri Lanka, it is reported that there was ‘anecdotal evidence of increased use of life jackets and greater involvement of women and family members in helping instill a culture of safety for fishers going to sea’.
PCO has taken a more systematic approach by doing studies like this. Additionally, with the exception of SRL and possibly INS, the efforts do not seem to have drawn from any previous FAO or other work. Consequently, RFLP’s approach on the output has been rather technical and conventional and more innovative and proactive market strategies were not taken.

131 The capacity of the governments: For key government staff, hands-on training by an IC was provided in PH and marketing in CMB, PHI, TIM and VIE. Government personnel also received TOT training on the issue, including value-chain analysis, and thereafter have been involved through LOAs in providing training to other stakeholders. However, the extent to which this training has truly developed advanced skills or translated into meaningful policy-level action remains to be seen. There have also been no policy- or advocacy-related activities in this output (again, given the donor’s desire to see funds go to the communities). An activity that might have been targeted at the government level was “public awareness of food safety issues enhanced.” Yet essentially only a review and assessment of food safety hazards in VIE is being done. Given the lack of a direct or indirect benefit on the communities, it is not clear why this activity was included in the RFLP.

132 The capacity of the communities: Generally, the communities have received little benefit in the end from the various activities in terms of improved ability to introduce improved fish products and improve market chains. This has been due to either inadequate or inappropriate support, or to schemes just getting underway. Under the activity, “fishers trained in fish handling, processing and business management”, the RFLP trained government staff to deliver knowledge on hygiene and sanitation to communities. Most of the trainings were for one day, which as in the case of other outputs raises doubts about their effectiveness; they were done in 2011 apparently without any follow-up and holistic production-through-marketing strategy.

133 Several pilot studies were also conducted to improve hygiene and sanitation with good hygiene practice standards on boats (CMB) and improve fresh fish supply through ice provision to selected sites (TIM). The CMB study has been delayed, and while community interviews indicate the TIM activity brought spoilage reductions and the scheme was planned for expansion, the ice is now no longer available because the ice-machines broke down. Other interventions, in SRL, INS and TIM, have provided iceboxes and other equipment for fish freshness and hygienic handling to SSFs and women fish vendors. However, there was little consideration of whether there would be reliable supplies of ice for the use of the equipment.

134 The importance of PHOs and supply-chain analyses emerges when considering imperfections in fish handling and processing. Understanding them as the product of weak knowledge could be taking a simplistic approach: usually a complex set of factors account for processing and handling practices, and often these do not get addressed. For example, the fishers of Chumpou Khmao village, CMB, have received higher prices for fish after using ice, but why they do not use it more when it has been available needs to be understood.

135 The activity of improving management of landing centres for improved hygiene, as illustrated from its implementation in VIE, CMB and TIM, tended to focus more on improving the infrastructure of these sites rather than on developing a system for site-users, i.e. fishers, traders and other workers to share the responsibility for their maintenance. In SRL, however, two fish stalls were modified to be models, and given the relatively small investment and direct livelihood benefits for the traders involved, this or selecting 1-2
existing centres and developing arrangements for shared management, might be better options than financing expensive site renovations.

136 For the communities, pilot operations for value-added products and marketing were also carried out. Much of the effort went into training groups of fish processors, mainly women, in improving the quality of their products through better processing techniques and learning how to make new ones. For these interventions as well, there were inadequate market and needs assessments done. They also generally ceased with trainings, offering no access to processing equipment or marketing support. Many of the products are more common ones that it would be difficult for the women to compete on with larger producers, would require more fish than is available after fresh fish is sold, and sold in small quantities in local markets. In terms of outcomes, the vast majority of training recipients have not continued with the techniques or been able to earn much revenue from the products. In TIM’s Atau’ro Island, for example, only 1 woman out of 129 trained in improved processing methods has been successful in marketing her goods.

137 Besides trainings, solar fish dryers were provided in SRL (12) and VIE (1). The results from SRL are not known, but given the poor history of artificial fish dryers in developing countries, the MTE would strongly advise against further investments in them.

138 Apart from the RFLP’s lack of follow-up support after training, two much deeper reasons help explain the limited effectiveness and benefits from the post-harvest product training. One is that fresh fish marketing holds considerably greater opportunities for marketing, and is the fastest growing fish supply-chain in any country with further scope for growth, than PH processing does. Investments in reducing losses, enhancing market reach, and improving food safety in this trade would bring higher gains to SSFs and fresh fish traders, the latter of which are not only often poor but also women. The MTE’s interactions with female fish processors in CMB and VIE clearly showed that they prefer to sell their fish fresh and use only what is left for processing as a last resort. And, no amount of processing is likely to add value to semi-spoiled fish; it might even give rise to food safety concerns that the RFLP wishes to address. In fact, while reliable statistics are lacking, the overall losses in fish supply-chains in the RFLP countries appear to be high, ranging from 20-40 percent. The programme did not undertake any activities to assess the losses and their economic dimensions, but might do so at the site level and address them if significant.

139 The second reason, as mentioned above, is that marketing support is critical. Fisheries is a market-driven activity and experience shows that where gains from the market are strong, processors will obtain the equipment or knowledge they need on their own. At the same time, markets are subject to several complex interactions determined by the local contexts (e.g., informal arrangements, credit-market linkages, uncertain supply and demand, etc.) and addressing these would be a meaningful strategy for improving livelihoods. Given the importance of marketing, the RFLP might have emphasized it over PH activities.

140 The activity, “improved market information”, has offered some potential to benefit the community stakeholders in the fish trade since the lack of information on fish prices in different markets is considered to be a main constraint for fishers to obtain better prices. However, except for INS, no country is discussing the possibility of developing a market information system. In VIE, fish auctioning systems on a pilot basis are being proposed (with a visit to INS for fishers and government staff there to understand the VIE system). A promising idea in TIM involved setting up a national cooperative federation to help fishers
better access markets, but it has not been pursued due to lack of interest among partner institutions, not least the cooperative leadership itself.

Finally, it should be noted that there has been no effort to assess whether successful PH and marketing interventions could have negative impacts on fisheries resources by increasing fishing intensity and what these impacts might be. The inter-linkages between the PH efforts and the co-management framework needs to be strengthened further to ensure proper integration between the two.

5.4 Output 4: Strengthened and diversified income opportunities for fisher communities

The output was intended to reduce fishing pressure by SSF communities through providing them with diversified, non-fishery dependent livelihoods and at the same time improving their well-being. At the inception stage, its scope was widened to also strengthen existing livelihoods that have been successful and non-harmful to fisheries resources.

In order to achieve the output, eight activities were suggested under three main components:

1. Feasibility assessment
   - Livelihood and gender needs and priority analyzed
   - Financial and technical feasibility of income options analyzed
   - Environmental and social impacts of the options assessed

2. Institutional strengthening and market access
   - Marketing strategies for products and services developed
   - Associations for producers and service providers strengthened
   - Exponents of diversified income trained

3. Pilot-scale interventions
   - Pilot operations for products and services conducted
   - Pilot operations for small-scale aquaculture conducted

The components together had the potential to serve well as the phases of the livelihoods development process the RFLP should follow, and this section evaluates the performance in each and the extent to which the sequence of them led to strengthened capacity towards improved livelihoods and sustainable fisheries resources management.

Solid needs and feasibility assessments should be regarded as the foundation for relevant and effective livelihoods strategies. Across the RFLP countries, sites and reports, the quality of the different assessments varied. Though for some places and studies it was strong, overall, as in the case of the PH work, the analyses has tended to be inadequate. Community consultations were conducted satisfactorily in CMB, SRL and VIE for example, and are vital as a tool to include before feasibility and impact analyses are done. However, there has been some tendency for the various livelihoods schemes communities have proposed in these consultations, regardless of their size and likely benefits, to be taken as the main basis for deciding what schemes the RFLP would pursue. As mentioned above, the analyses of these projects in terms of their feasibility and impact could use significant improvement. Moreover, in CMB, based on the communities’ selection of nearly the same set of schemes,
there is reason to believe that a standard menu of options from which to choose was given to them. In many cases, there has been no rationale based on the assessments done them why investments have been made in particular projects.

146 In SRL, for example, hair-dressing was adopted as an activity based on the request of some community members. But the ability of this activity to provide for a significant number of households or to even provide much income for a few in a local market is most likely modest. Additionally, as a positive step a national stakeholder workshop on on-going and past livelihoods development programmes was conducted and a set of guidelines were developed for future livelihood development initiatives in the RFLP area with a special emphasis on sustainability. This was then followed up with a technical assessment to identify home garden and livestock development opportunities. And, beneficiaries were subsequently trained in home gardening and fifty gardens were established. The MTE could not visit SRL to obtain more information, though the questions arise as to why home gardens were identified as the best livelihood investment and what positive or negative effects would result on fisheries resources. Due to a lack of a more strategic approach in the RFLP, a very wide variety of schemes, including those likely to be quite small in terms of scale and potential benefits have been pursued or accepted. The MTE could find little value added by the RFLP on this output.

147 Missing from the all of the reports reviewed was also any in-depth gender analysis, or as discussed below with regard to co-management, any environmental impact assessment of the livelihood alternatives, with the exception of the aquaculture initiative the VIE counterpart agencies proposed.

148 In some instances or countries, more analytical approaches and rigorous analyses were carried out. In PHI, alternative livelihood investment plans were developed to define the overall strategy, identify innovative approaches, determine weaknesses (and propose solutions) in the adoption of new livelihoods SSFs, and to provide a plan for the allocation of budget for capacity building. The process also included a strategic cost-sharing partnership with the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Science and Technology, and microfinance institutions. Fifteen livelihood projects were identified and business plans were subsequently formulated based on feasibility appraisals of them.

149 In VIE, the Hue College of Economics conducted a comprehensive, in-depth feasibility study, drawing upon the sustainable livelihoods approaches, of income options for the coastal fishing communities in the three RFLP provinces (Thua Thien Hue, Quang Tri and Quang Nam). The study provided a livelihood profile of the fishing communities and identified a range of options assessed for their suitability to fishers in different income brackets. Although the study was sound in its economic analysis, it leaned towards particular aquaculture schemes that were technically, socially and environmentally infeasible. In any case, the PMUs followed their own decision-making process and supported livelihoods options. As this section discusses further below, the PMUs and local government entities have in many cases determined without real community consultation or benefit analyses what projects will be implemented.

150 With the exception of the study mentioned above, there has been little if any systematic and explicit look at the other, existing livelihoods of SSF households and how barriers to their expansion might be addressed. Livelihood diversification is common in
fishing communities, due to their uncertain incomes, seasonal nature of operations and poor status. Moreover, it is not linear in nature. This “natural” diversification was seen in CMB, VIE and TIM. Understanding better the activities, how they are utilized by the households, how they positively or negatively affect fishery resources and what opportunities and desires there are to enhance them would be a contribution the RFLP could bring.

151 Under the proposed second phase for the output, institutional strengthening and market access, there has actually been little, if any of these activities, and only technical or business training for livelihood activities. In this respect, the RFLP has missed opportunities since, as the preceding section points out, understanding the markets the communities are involved in and improving their position in those markets may be more effective than providing them with new skills.

152 What is reflected in the RFLP’s selection of livelihood projects, and characterizes the RFLP’s work more broadly is insufficient awareness of the many experiences of other organizations in the past with creating environmentally sustainable livelihoods. While the programme has had a component to share its lessons with external organizations, it has not sought to learn very actively from the outside world. In fact, two decades of work show that shifting communities out of fishing (or any natural resource management use) for environmental conservation and improved livelihoods is highly challenging and complex. It could be useful to the RFLP if it draws more on that work

153 As a consequence of weak planning overall, most of the pilot projects the RFLP has supported are either small in scale, involving only a handful of beneficiaries, will not have a significant impact on incomes, are not technically or financially viable in the long-term, and/or are not well-targeted to poorer, fishing-dependent households. These were certainly the findings of the country visits. Most have also been initiated only recently, due to delays in implementation, making it too early to see any outcomes. From a broader perspective, the schemes are also unlikely to reduce fishing pressure to any substantial degree. Some of the more well-structured ones that can cover a relatively larger group of households are adopted from NGOs that have been implementing the schemes at the sites for years, raising the question of what added-value the RFLP is bringing.

154 Projects on aquaculture as an alternative livelihood have been initiated in VIE, PHI and TIM and being planned in CMB. However, the culture species and production systems require a significant initial capital investment and entail recurring cash outlays for formulated feed. This would exclude the poor. The projects also carry the risk of increasing the capture of fish for feed. The RFLP has rightly withheld support from them. The exception is seaweed farming in TIM and PHI. It is a low-investment, low-tech system, the product has a stable global market, and it optimizes family labour.

155 In TIM, the RFLP, owing to the strong request of the NDFA, has supported the formulation of a national strategic plan for the development of aquaculture for the purpose of improving fish production and nutrition in remote areas seldom reached by marine fish products. However, based on the PCO’s comparative advantage and the programme’s focus on coastal fisheries, and its engagement of WorldFish to develop the plan, it should at this point disengage from providing further support on it.

156 More broadly, the RFLP has not pursued support for livelihoods enhancement and diversification (SLED) under the framework of CM for fishery resource sustainability. And,
given the absence of any precautionary standards and science applied to avoid negative environmental impacts, several of the income-generating activities proposed or implemented indicate they could have adverse effects on the coastal resources. The crab bank schemes in CMB, for example, bring the risk of crab over-harvesting as their future members are interested in investing their returns from the bank into increased trapping.

157 Echoing the findings and conclusions of the section on CM, because of the complex interactions between livelihoods and natural resource use diversified income-generation cannot be expected to lead automatically to reduced fishing. Increased incomes from other sources could actually encourage SSFs to remain in their trade. Implementing SLED as an output independent of CM may raise the risk of continued fishing pressure, or at the very least has hindered the achievement of Output 1. Without a genuine CM agreement with SSFs where they appreciate the need for sustainability, they are unlikely to have the motivation to pursue real livelihood alternatives.

5.5 Output 5: Facilitated access to micro-finance services for the fishers, processors and traders

158 Of the five site-level outputs, the least progress has been achieved on facilitating microfinance access. This has been due largely to the difficulty several of the PCOs experienced in finding NCs with the necessary skills in the subject.

159 This output is based upon the critical requirement in the small-scale fisheries sector for appropriate credit support for the fishing communities to meet productive and consumption needs. The lack of inclusion of microfinance in the policies for poverty alleviation and fisheries, and the failure of formal credit programmes to be viable and accessible to the fishers, together with the recognition of the positive attributes of informal savings and credit markets are suggested as the reasons for RFLP to focus on facilitating access to microfinance services to the fishing communities.

160 Six activities were suggested to obtain the output:
  - MFIs educated on fishery sector needs and issues
  - Policies for lending institutions updated
  - Savings and lending systems simplified
  - Proposals for introduction of insurance schemes developed and promoted
  - Community members trained in financial planning and management
  - Micro-finance briefing materials produced

161 Most of the work in the RFLP countries, with the exception of PHI, has been rather ad hoc and has not covered all the suggested activities. More importantly, as the Relevance section describes, the output was also weakly conceived at design, as no real assessment was done of the demands for MF in the selected communities.

162 Only after implementation began was a scoping study conducted by the Asia Pacific Agricultural and Rural Credit Association (APRACA) on SSF needs for MF, the availability of services in this area for them, and the possibilities for micro-finance institutions to develop new lending policies. The study provides a range of recommendations for each country. The late assessment contributed to the delay in the output. Interview with APRACA staff confirmed some of the scoping study findings: that SSFs would have difficulty in accessing
microfinance due to various factors: lack of MF services in remote fishing areas, of sufficient assets, and the seasonal nature of fishing.

Nevertheless, the MTE found that in many of the RFLP communities visited, in VIE and TIM for example, SSF households are already borrowing small loans from various types of lenders (MFIs, quasi-government banks and informal lenders) to support their existing livelihoods. As a result, they are also quite financially literate. The loans have been to maintain livelihoods, i.e. to buy new nets, repair or buy engines, and support non-fishing livelihoods. But community members realize their limits and would like to access larger loans, to which they do not have access. At the same time, it appears that the small loans obtained are not sufficient to help SSFs shift out of fishing—if that is what they wish to do.

The emphasis on microfinance institutions (MFIs) might be at the cost of ignoring the formal channels (commercial banks) on the one hand and – more significantly – the informal channels (local trader-lenders) who frequently account for a vast proportion of the credit supply in the fishing communities. In not examining the informal money-lending operations and enhancing the fishers’ bargaining capacity in them, RFLP might be missing an opportunity. The programme at the beginning also overlooked the wide variety of credit-lending agencies and as a result of this it may have been difficult for PCOs to understand what interventions they should take and to which institutions they should direct them.

The needs of SSFs in terms of credit most likely vary over the countries and even sites, and the PCOs have approached a variety of different institutions and with different strategies. Most of these have been discussions and awareness programmes in countries like INS, TIM and SRL with local MFIs, banks, and NGOs, with limited progress. In PHI, MOUs were signed with the Microfinance Council of PHI, Katipunan Bank and Sindangan FACOMA Community Cooperative, to have them conduct advocacy and training with MFIs, in order to mobilize their support for livelihoods diversification in fishing communities. There are also plans for designing credit extension plans for the country. No outcomes have been reported for this activity yet as the MOUs were signed only recently.

In response to the larger credit needs of some SSF households, TIM PCO has adapted the output somewhat by exploring the possibility of loans from the national bank. This could be worthwhile approach for the VIE team to take as well. Although the PCO’s strategy has been to foster financial literacy in the FAs so that these institutions can operate a revolving fund using member fees, interviews with the FA members reveal that the funds would be too little to offer loans that are sizable or to several individuals. Most households in the communities are also already borrowing from small loans from different institutions.

In SRL, a fish finance strategy is being finalized, which seeks to develop the means to look at how access to micro finance could be expanded; develop and implement a funding model that broadens and strengthens the funding base; maximizes resources and accelerate growth and sustainability; and improve governance, management and service of the system.

At the regional level, it has been reported that RFLP was assessing possibilities to develop community-managed loan funds through a partnership with the Village Savings and Loan Associates (VSLA) Ltd. The progress with these assessments, reported in the first half of 2011, is not yet known. Yet for all of the above initiatives, given the delays in pursuing this output it is unlikely that the loans will be available by the RFLP’s end.
One central reason behind the challenges with this output, the MTE believes, is that it was not properly integrated with Output 4 on livelihoods and under an overall livelihoods framework, making it a stand-alone activity that the national teams can choose to take on or not. This is very unfortunate because sufficient experience exists around the world to show that access to adequate credit at an affordable cost could immediately improve the incomes as well as the livelihood security of poorer people.

On the issue of insurance, which is both a critical component in reducing the vulnerability of fishing communities and one of the activities suggested under this output, very few efforts have been noted in any of the countries. Only in SRL, did RFLP facilitate the launching of a micro-insurance scheme in selected MFIs with the support of Mercy Corps and Janashakthi Insurance Company. The MFIs are in the process of raising awareness amongst their clients on the newly launched micro insurance system. Given the importance of insurance – which also has a direct implication also on the outcomes from the safety-at-sea initiatives – the inability to make much progress in this activity is a significant gap for RFLP’s effectiveness.

With respect to all the country-level outputs, the MTE reached certain general findings on the effect that the level of capacity of partner institutions and national consultants had on programme delivery, and on the efforts of the programme to strengthen capacity in accordance with its stated outcome. Implementation by the sub-national counterpart agencies, other local partners and NCs has hindered the RFLP significantly because of the undeveloped capacity of these staff at these levels and of the consultants. The LOA modality was the correct path for the programme to take in the long-run, despite its involving a time-consuming process, given the importance of providing country ownership of the programme aims and adding to the capacity of partner institutions. Yet the quality of work delivered through LOAs has been a serious issue because sub-national staff still need the necessary skills and knowledge. Where training was given to these staff to enable them to undertake work or train others, it appears that it was often too short to ensure to give them the necessary capacity.

Where capacity-strengthening has been effective programme and government staff have worked closely and over a significant period of time. While LOAs can be useful for additional capacity-building if the necessary skills foundation exists, their use alone could not constitute a capacity-strengthening strategy. This is especially so given the depth and coverage of individual and institutional capacity building needed at the local level in developing countries. Certainly LOAs have not been effective as a strategy in the RFLP.

The PHI’s experience illustrates the role that capacity has played. The RFLP there has, for a number of reasons, had the option to implement work directly and achievements there have been greater. Although this could have meant low country engagement and thus risks to future sustainability, the national government has actually shown significant interest in the programme there, perhaps owing to the good results.

In VIE, additional challenges have been faced where the PMUs have on several occasions conducted weak selection and targeting of community-level interventions and have departed from agreed plans with the RFLP. The RFLP sensibly proposed to use more third-party providers, but has only been partially successful.
5.6 Output 6: Regional sharing of knowledge in support of livelihood development and reduced vulnerability for fisher communities and of sustainable fisheries resource management

The ProDoc did not contain a work plan for this Output because “Regional Knowledge Sharing” as a distinct output was activated only after the Information Officer who is responsible for the component had been recruited. Recruitment was made about a year after inception, even as monitoring and evaluation was omitted in his terms of reference. Nonetheless, the ProDoc describes a Communications Strategy Matrix (Annex 6 of the ProDoc), which constitutes the framework for implementation of the Output. It specifies the objectives of each type of message, the types of messages to be produced, their audiences or targets, and the medium for delivery. The objectives however are stated as a process or activity, viz, policy development, advocacy, technical knowledge sharing and skills development, and project management. It tends to move the assessment of effectiveness from the achievement of an impact to the implementation of a process.

With this consideration the MTE focused on the sub outputs of Regional Knowledge Sharing. These consist of one structure with a physical (website) and organizational (network) component, two types of information products, and two kinds organized information for management decisions. These are:

- Learning and information sharing network established (website)
- Case studies prepared and disseminated
- Best practices identified, analyzed and disseminated
- Common policy issues reviewed, analyzed and recommendations issued
- Trans-boundary issues highlighted

The first output has been established and is operating. It is the core of the public information service of RFLP. It is well maintained and regularly updated and contains short readable articles. Supplementing this is the e-newsletter which is sent to over 1,000 individual subscribers working in various institutions and organizations, government fisheries officials in Asia-Pacific, fisheries professionals and participants in regional conferences and events, and FAO fisheries staff in Rome. It is also disseminated in Africa via SARNISSA, a research information network in Sub-Saharan Africa and to fisheries researchers through the Asian Fisheries Society.

However, the website is not being used as a platform for interactive discussion of issues, sharing of experiences and lessons learned, or problem analysis through such arrangements as a moderated forum. It is therefore not performing on the stated task on the RFLP’s Knowledge Sharing webpage: “The lessons learned in the different countries will be pooled and analyzed at the regional level and communicated to the participating countries and others in the region.” This has been in large part because the monitoring and reporting system developed in the RFLP mainly tracks activities. It precluded bringing into a web-based forum meaningful and organized information on lessons and outcomes, which are essential to make a web based discussion worth the investment in time and effort by the participants.

The second and third outputs - case studies and best practices - have been limited to one best practice, namely, the Best Practices for Gender Mainstreaming in the Fisheries
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Sector. However, plans have been made to initiate activities to write case studies and compile more best-practice guidelines in the second half of the project life. For this, the PMO is redesigning its M&E system to be able to capture the relevant data and information for writing cases and developing best-practice guidelines. Of late, the RFLP has been collecting “significant change” and success stories, which, however, need more in-depth treatment and analyses.

Cross-learning among national project staff has been intended through in country technical workshops organized along particular themes. Other than national project staff, the workshops include personnel from government fishery and related agencies (i.e. agriculture, finance, and rural development). There has not been much evidence though that the information shared at these events has influenced or been incorporated into national policy and programmes; and the M&E system is now only devising a system to gauge this outcome.

For policy and advocacy, APFIC has convened technical workshops, such as best practices to support and improve livelihoods of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture households (cited in the section Methodology), designed to provide policy and programme development advice to APFIC member governments but also present conceptual and programme implementation guides to RFLP. Key staff of PCO, some NPCs and NPDs have attended APFIC meetings. But apart from APFIC events, there has not been a regional initiative for an organized and focused event to learn from experiences and lessons of earlier or ongoing projects. Nonetheless some relevant lessons from earlier projects have been compiled and shared by their being published in a website (i.e. TIM’s www.peskador.org). There are also lesson-learning activities organized at the national level, and RFLP staff participate in events of other projects whose representatives are in turn invited to NCC meetings as a platform intended for information exchange.

Presentation and discussion of programme results that would be useful for policy development are also intended to be made in regional and global forums organized with or by regional partners. The statement of purposes includes “efforts to forge networks linking projects, institutions and individuals so as to effectively share information and help forward the aid effectiveness agenda.” In this regard, the project has forged some linkages with various entities including civil-society organizations and NGOs - e.g. Coral Triangle Initiative, Coral Triangle Fishers’ Forum, The Nature Conservancy, Sulu-Celebes Sea, Lesser Sunda Sustainable Fisheries Initiative, One Source, ATSEA, WWF, and the Wetlands Alliance - and regional and International organizations - e.g. ILO EAST, WFC, IUCN, WFP, UN agencies in Indonesia, BOBLME, and SEAFDEC. The MTE notes however the lack of a more strategic and fully developed approach to sharing information and collaborating with a number of the listed regional partners such as NACA and SEAFDEC, and considers that the RFLP may be lacking depth and focus in its regional partnerships.

The rating for effectiveness overall, considering all of the outputs and the approximate outcomes that could be expected to be achieved for each at this point in the programme’s life (given the absence of mid-term outcomes articulated by the RFLP) is Inadequate/Unsatisfactory.

With respect to the role that the governing bodies have had in lesson-learning and strategic direction, the NCCs have had the potential to be entities that conduct strategic planning and that learn and discuss experiences and lessons from the ground. Yet up to this point the opportunity available is being largely missed: based on the MTE team’s
observations of the VIE NCC meeting in early 2012, and interviews in the other countries visited, the meetings are largely to see what activities-steps were or were not completed and to approve the next six-month plan of activities, with little discussion on how different output strategies are faring and the factors behind their performance. Additionally, though a number of other agencies that could be involved in developing alternative/diversified livelihoods do attend, their support in implementation is not actually obtained. However, the situation may be different for some of the countries, for instance PHI. Regarding the PSC, while is the highest governing body for the RFLP, it does not seem to be making use of its potential to provide strategic guidance to the programme or demanding lessons from it.

5.7 Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is intended to be a cross-cutting theme within the RFLP, perhaps one of few fisheries programmes in the region to have given much attention to it in its design. It is curious then as to why the programme did not make greater provisions for gender expertise in it when the ProDoc states that paying attention to gender concerns as a key to the improvement of livelihoods and the reduction of vulnerability of fishing communities. In the PMO, an Associate Programme Officer shared with APFIC oversees the gender mainstreaming work. In the PCOs, the M&E officers are delegated the role, a considerable task for them considering their heavy workload and limited background on gender.

At the regional level, a key output of this component has been the field manual, *Mainstreaming gender into project cycle management in the fisheries sector*, which is being widely disseminated in the RFLP countries and translated into some of their national languages. In CMB, RFLP also developed a training manual, *Gender Awareness and Gender Mainstreaming in Fisheries Sector*, for use in the field. The guides are a good beginning and act as primers on the subject for the partner government staff. However, despite being focused on fishing communities, the extent to which the complex gender relations within fisheries are explored in depth and conceptualized for application is insufficient. The fisherwomen as presented in the guides come across as simple, passive, uni-dimensional stereotypes. The focus on their weak positions in the society overlooks their strength, resilience and adaptability – making them come across as victims rather than as strong individuals in their own right. Similar doubts remain as to the understanding about the ‘local’ in what appears to be a more generic and culturally very broad understanding of gender issues.

Additionally, the premise behind RFLP’s gender mainstreaming focus is that there has been little work of this kind in South and Southeast Asia. The sophisticated gender analyses of organizations such as the International Collective in Support of Fish-workers then do not seem to have fed into the RFLP, which is a loss as it could have contributed to a more focused approach.

The conceptualisation of gender as women prevails in the programme at all levels, with men being looked upon at best as facilitators in the process of empowering women or at worst as the exploiters of the women’s labours. There is a failure to understand gender as a relationship, and that gender is only one of many ways in which power and influence are
differentially distributed in society and (often) made to appear as if it is a matter of nature – or at least inevitability.

185 One outcome with the single-minded focus on women as gender can be summed up in a response by one national staff member who reported to the MTE: “We trained 25 genders in fish processing”. Not surprisingly, the fishers – both men and women – interviewed during the MTE had a more balanced idea of gender and how it worked.

186 The most visible aspect of RFLP’s work on gender mainstreaming involves ensuring the participation of a certain proportion of women (40%) in all project activities – training, workshops, etc. Consequently, the number and proportion of women attending any project activity becomes the indicator for gender mainstreaming within RFLP. This is problematic on at least two counts, as follows.

187 At a basic level, as some national staff complained, ensuring the participation of an assured proportion of women in a project activity is not often in their hands; they could certainly make attempts to ensure the women’s participation as much as possible, but – short of physically forcing them to come – cannot really take responsibility for their attendance, given the complex socio-economic context in different communities.

188 At a more fundamental level, without a better, qualitative, understanding of the level of the women’s participation in project activities, mere emphasis on numbers or percentages of women as an indicator of ‘gender mainstreaming’ makes it simplistic and problematic. Ensuring at least the presence of women in the RFLP activities might be a good enough beginning, but the project must move beyond the numbers and into more nuanced and qualitative areas if the presence of women were to mean anything more than being symbolic or, going by the dominating role taken by men in the MTE’s field interactions in some villages in Vietnam and CMB, one might even suggest that the women could be attending the RFLP’s activities because they were told so by men – thus, without clearer indicators, high attending rates could well be a market of subordination, rather than the other way round.

189 This is particularly important in case of the training programmes on gender. RFLP undertook a sizeable number of community-level trainings on gender in most partner countries, but the duration of training (as in CMB) remains one or two days. Given the deep-rooted, historically and socially-driven nature of the gender imbalances prevailing in the communities, it is obviously ambitious to expect a 1 or 2 day training to give rise to a more equally balanced gender equation in the communities. More balanced and meaningful indicators to assess such activities are badly lacking now. As the field manual recognises, gender is essentially a matter of power and how it works in different societies, so good social analysis is necessary in all project areas to understand not only gender but also other social dimensions in order to make a more structured beginning to address the issues of power.

190 RFLP might have succumbed to two common mistakes: the first involves overlooking the fact that ‘women’ are not a homogeneous entity and that there are women who are rich and powerful and then there are women who are poor and not-so-powerful – and it is the latter that should form the focus of the RFLP intervention. This is also reflected in the varying degrees of enlightenment and empowerment among women in different countries (as PHI and CMB) and even different communities within a country (as in CMB), requiring a more appropriate intervention in each case. Secondly, by focusing on women for certain specific activities such as post-harvest training (or hairdressing as in SRL); RFLP might be
running the risk of reinforcing stereotypes itself. There are men who are also into fish processing and who needed to be included in the programmes. On the other hand, in SRL, it is reported by RFLP that the women had not been actively involved in trainings on SatS ‘since these programmes are not directly relevant to women’, which again runs against RFLP’s main objectives.

In Quang Loi PA co-management group, the men insisted that the women were not involved in fishing and that co-management was not their area of work anyway. Later interactions with women showed that the men were wrong on both counts: the women did fish and they were indeed interested in the PA because – they said – whatever changed their households’ access to fish had relevance for them, whether they fished or not. Curiously, the women in this village had no idea about the RFLP and said they hadn’t heard anything about its gender-related work.

Overall, while gender mainstreaming inclusion in the RFLP was a contribution, the programme must deepen its understanding of gender roles in its communities and develop more sophisticated tools for analysis and mainstreaming. While this component is rated Inadequate/Unsatisfactory in terms of effectiveness, its relevance to the SSF community contexts and to FAO’s gender equality policy is rated High.

5.8 Impact

According to the ProDoc, the RFLP’s desired impact is to “...make a contribution to improved livelihoods and reduced vulnerability of small-scale fishing communities in the participating countries and in the South and Southeast Asian Regions”, and that one of its outcomes is “Strengthened capacity among participating small-scale fishing communities and their supporting institutions towards improved livelihoods and sustainable fisheries resources.” The Effectiveness section avers to some positive indications of future impact on the communities as well as local governments and other local institutions, but also to some potentially negative effects on the environment from certain schemes, though it is probably too early at this stage of the programme, given the delay in implementation, to expect any actual improvements in community livelihoods.

Regarding unintended positive effects, including the influence on government policies, owing to the RFLP’s technical advice the PHI government instituted a moratorium on sardine fishing, effective even during key periods for capture. In VIE there has arisen an opportunity to inform co-management provisions of the Fishery Law with the project. Beyond these cases, there have not been any notable impacts on government policies or institutional capacities. Overall, impact is rated Inadequate/Unsatisfactory.

5.9 Sustainability

The prospects for sustainability of the RFLP’s benefits and the processes the programme has introduced in the countries are at this point in time rather weak. An exception is PHI, where the fisheries agency and the local governments have demonstrated interest in sustaining the programme by developing plans to implement activities and by providing counterpart funding. With respect to possible future support from the donor,
AECID’s priorities have not lain in the region and the fisheries sector within it. Through FAO and to the RFLP-participating countries the Spanish government has tended to give more funding to food security. Although interested in seeing a programmatic approach to reducing small-fisher vulnerability after the tsunami and a visit by the Queen of Spain to affected areas in the region, it is unlikely that AECID will extend the programme further. Due to the composition of staff in AECID’s offices in the region, the technical capacity to learn from the RFLP and transfer its lessons to other similar initiatives in other, priority regions has not been present.

196 The benefits in terms of impacts on livelihoods are too few or small presently for their sustainability to be considered. While they may be emerging now, there is a concern that given the less than two years and hence short time remaining the improvements will not be notable. Furthermore, many intermediate outcomes, such as improved awareness and knowledge or institutional arrangements (e.g. for rice banks or engine repair) that would be needed for future and more substantive outcomes and impacts, might not be maintained or followed up on in the absence of the RFLP.

197 Regarding co-management as well, without the RFLP’s presence the work of establishing legal small-fisher groups would not occur or would take place more slowly and without the quality the RFLP brings. Yet, the outcomes in this area achieved thus far have fallen short of real ownership and understanding of co-management by the group members for them to continue meaningfully on their own.

198 There exist the technical and financial risks that the interventions for livelihoods, including post-harvest processing and marketing, are not feasible and therefore will not be successful. However, the primary risk to sustainability and to the RFLP’s aims being pursued in the future is the lack of institutional capacity in local governments in most of the countries for planning and implementing environmentally sustainable (for fisheries resources) diversified alternative livelihoods (or strengthening existing ones) on their own and on a larger scale than the individual community. Once the RFLP closes, the entities that would logically adopt the aims and responsibilities of the programme would be the sub-national and local fisheries and other agencies and government units. Yet the systems, i.e. knowledge, organizational capacity, coordination and resources, for this are not in place and there is no concerted effort to bring them about.

199 In CMB, for example, the PCO has taken the intelligent and innovative step of involving the communes in discussions with the CFis, yet there is still much information-sharing, coordination and resource-generation that needs to happen by and among these two entities. In many cases, the CFis have little knowledge of the communes’ Community Investment Plans (CIP) and the resources available for them, let alone a voice in deciding how the resources should be used. The CIP budgets are small as might be expected and allocated to a single general purpose (e.g. infrastructure). The planning coordination would have to extend to the Sangkat12 and Division-level of the FiA for managing alternative sustainable livelihoods development in small-fisher dominated areas. A worrying phenomenon at the cantonment level of the FiA is the national government’s substantial decrease in their budget this year and the uncertainty over what future allocations will be.

12 The lowest level, below Division, in the FiA’s organizational structure
In VIE, adding to these agency coordination and financing challenges has been the tendency, as seen in the RFLP, of the sub-national entities deciding unilaterally (and in many cases incorrectly) what livelihoods options would be beneficial for the communities.

Finally, in these two countries as well as in most of the others, non-fisheries sectors (e.g. agriculture, small-business, forestry, transport, tourism, labour, etc.) to which small-fisher households would increasingly need to shift have not been adequately involved in alternative livelihoods development despite some RFLP efforts to bring them in. Private sector actors, to better connect fisher communities to larger markets, and NGOs and donors, to help fund activities and replicate successes, all vital for sustaining the RFLP’s initiatives are not presently engaged either. How decentralization will work as an effective strategy for development under the broad policies for it in VIE, CMB and some of the other countries, is a question beyond the RFLP’s scope to answer. It will, however, need to seek to address those aspects of coordination and capacity specific to maintaining its work.

The sustainability of the RFLP in TIM would, unfortunately, not be very promising at this point owing to the newly emerging institutions in the country, the low availability of resources and technical and planning capacity that is still to be strengthened at the national and sub-national levels. It is compensated in part by the foreseeable continuation of the fishing census system established and most of all by the strong support of the NPD, the Director-General of the NDFA, to the programme and his solid leadership of that institution. In fact, the RFLP has the asset of good support and interest of several of the NPDs who are in senior positions of government, an asset which it might use to build sustainability.

In PHI, it appears that the likelihood of the processes the RFLP has given rise to being sustained is much greater. CM organizations are at the municipal level and involve not only FARMCs but also technical working groups to build technical capacity in local government units and entities from non-fishery agencies, such as those concerned with economic development. BFAR has also announced that it will provide substantial co-funding for RFLP activities in 2012 and adopt greater implementation responsibilities. The PCO is also carrying out a somewhat more explicit effort to give the bureau more ownership and technical knowledge, and working to include RFLP activities in BFAR’s recurrent annual budgeting. In SRL as well, the Department of Fisheries has stated it will take steps to absorb the RFLP into its action plans, and has the resources to continue the programme’s work. Considering the likelihood of the RFLP’s benefits and programme being sustained is all six countries, the sustainability rating at this mid-point would be Inadequate/Unsatisfactory. However, sustainability is often not in place in the middle of the programme and could improve by its end.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

After less than two years of implementation—effectively only about one—with programme planning that has been weak and overambitious in many respects, sometimes challenging partner government relations to maintain, and lengthy administrative processes, the RFLP has not been able to achieve significant results. The design, efficiency and
effectiveness challenges have also accumulated to pose significant risks to the sustainability of the programme and to any benefits it produces. In effect, there has been a system within the RFLP of a negative chain of effects whereby the weaknesses of each aspect or at each stage of the programme have produced shortcomings or challenges in all the succeeding ones. The question is what measures, specific and broad, and feasible can be taken to reform the “system” in order to enhance the RFLP’s effectiveness and sustainability.

205 The programme does also possess strengths that must be capitalized on. These are its overall substantial relevance to the national fishery, poverty reduction and decentralization agendas; its potential to share analyses and lessons of what has and has not worked across the region for replication and upscaling; the committed, capable and innovative NPCs and their staff who know their country contexts well; the strong support from many of the NPDs and key government agencies, and interest of sub-national staff; the hard work and management expertise of the PMO, and the interest and willingness of the communities.

6.2 Recommendations

206 In light of the RFLP’s various challenges and strengths, the MTE makes the following ten recommendations:

For the RFLP and Partner Governments on Effectiveness and Sustainability

207 Because (a) the RFLP’s resources are insufficient to achieve significant results given the number of countries, beneficiary communities, and programme outputs, (b) there is a need to yet see significant livelihood impacts from the RFLP and the modest amount of time it has remaining, and (c) the lower relevance of the SatS and microfinance access outputs and the delay in implementing the latter, the programme in consultation with its government partners should:

Recommendation 1: Focus RFLP implementations on a smaller set of selected, more promising sites for more comprehensive work to produce substantial livelihood impacts and solid lessons for sharing and up-scaling, while still maintaining some level of activity in the other communities, and pursue the Safety at Sea and microfinance access outputs further only if rigorous analyses reveal that they will contribute significantly to improved livelihoods and reduced vulnerability and communities request these interventions.

208 Based on Recommendation 1, the RFLP would focus on the remaining three outputs. Yet diversified/alternative livelihoods development and post-harvest and marketing are inadequately linked with fisheries resources co-management, which could result in potential negative impacts on the coastal resources. At the same time, the resources, knowledge and institutional capacity being brought into livelihoods development in the countries is insufficient to generate significant livelihood benefits and provide an incentive to the communities to sustain fisheries resources. Recommendation 2 tackles this aspect.

Recommendation 2: Pursue livelihoods diversification, including post-harvest and marketing promotion in a
more integrated manner with fisheries resource co-management so as to ensure that livelihoods development and post-harvest projects do not have negative consequences for coastal resources. And, at the same time broaden the co-management framework, as some RFLP country teams are doing, to include livelihoods enhancement by involving different government agencies (fisheries and non-fisheries) and private actors for the purpose of developing larger-impacting schemes and demonstrating to communities that benefits can come in the place of natural resource use.

209 Addressing gender inequalities in the beneficiary communities has been challenging for the RFLP for a variety of reasons. A clear concept of what is intended by “gender mainstreaming” in the context of SSF communities with gendered divisions of labour is not present. And, while seeking to ensure that women are equally represented at events is a good step, it would not merit the term mainstreaming. At the same time, the effort to change gender relations in the communities through short workshops has been overambitious. Too adopt a more realistic but useful approach, the RFLP should:

**Recommendation 3:**

Focus its gender mainstreaming work in rigorously analyzing the effects, positive and negative, of potential livelihood enhancement/diversification (including post-harvest) schemes and fisheries co-management decisions (as some women participate in fishing), on women given their responsibilities, and on the relations between men and women, as a part of livelihoods options assessments and feasibility analyses. These assessments should of course be done with community participation, and as some gendered divisions of labor are likely to continue they should also be used to foster the men’s respect for women and their tasks.

210 The outcome of the RFLP is stated as “strengthened capacity among participating small-scale fishing communities...towards improved livelihoods and sustainable fisheries resources management.” However, the real capacity of SSF fisher groups for co-management remains rather weak. Furthermore, the policies and regulations needed for genuine co-management and to provide communities with greater ownership and authority in it appear to be lacking. SSFs also operate in complex settings where other actors, such as commercial and illegal fishers are affecting them, making the co-management arrangements less relevant. These issues are being addressed to some extent in some of the RFLP countries, but the programme in the sites it focuses on needs to:

**Recommendation 4:**

Invest more effort in educating SSFs on co-management, cultivating their understanding of their own practices on fisheries resources and how conserving these resources could benefit them in the long-term so fishers can take more responsibility in co-management; identify where co-management legislation and regulations need to be further improved to enable more effective co-management and SSFs more ownership and work with the partner governments to initiate a process of reform; and, engage more fully the various public and private stakeholders (illegal/commercial fishers, other communities, the range of government agencies) to develop more meaningful co-management arrangements.

211 Given that (a) a large number of activities are being implemented on each output that are small in scale and hence unlikely to bring substantial benefits, and are often not based on strong needs assessments and technical and financial analyses, (b) there is insufficient
integration between the outputs, and (c) the RFLP can make much greater use of the experience and knowledge from the field of livelihoods diversification/development and co-management to inform its work:

**Recommendation 5:**

| The PMO should use its broad vision of the RFLP’s aims to provide greater and higher-level, strategic guidance to the PCOs to help them focus their work in order to produce more substantive impacts in their respective contexts, and support them further in learning from the fields of livelihoods diversification/development and natural resource co-management. It could do the latter by providing models and lessons from these fields, best-practice tools, methods and examples of needs assessments and feasibility analysis. |

212 The RFLP’s desired outcome includes strengthened capacity of the institutions supporting SSFs. However, despite the efforts to achieve it through LOAs with government and other institutions, the capacity of these entities and the cooperation among them to support livelihoods diversification and co-management in the future have many gaps and require stronger efforts to address them. Where capacity-strengthening of partners has worked in the RFLP there has been longer-term, in-depth and closer engagement of government staff. The PHI offers a good model for multi-institutional coordination that the other sites can learn from. The MTE therefore formulated recommendation 6 to the RFLP:

**Recommendation 6:**

| Formulate and implement an explicit, concerted strategy for the remainder of the programme to strengthen the technical, planning and management capacity of government partner institutions, and the coordination among these entities along with non-fisheries agencies (extension, forestry, small-business, infrastructure, etc.) and market and NGO actors to support larger-scale diversified livelihoods development and co-management and sustain the RFLP’s work in the long-term and for the selected sites. To strengthen capacity and coordination, provide more in-depth, hands training through twinning arrangements between RFLP and government staff, which will also ensure quality delivery during implementation. Budget savings from reducing the geographic and thematic scope of the RFLP would allow such a capacity-building strategy. |

213 While the RFLP develops annual work plans these are shorter-term plans for activities to be implemented rather than full strategies that outline what intermediate results are needed to achieve the end outcomes for an intervention and how the programme will bring them about. Partly as a result of this there has often been little follow-up on activities (e.g. trainings, equipment provision, etc.) and benefits have not emerged or are not clear. The RFLP should therefore:

**Recommendation 7:**

| Develop a long-term strategic plan for the remainder of the programme for each country and for each of the three remaining country-level outputs and the regional lesson-sharing one, including steps that will allow for exit and sustainability. These plans should make explicit |
the theory of change that will be employed for each intervention, i.e. the logical sequence of intermediate results that will be pursued to achieve the desired outcomes.  

214 Despite possessing an output dedicated to sharing the RFLP’s lessons with national and regional governments and organizations, there has yet been no sharing of any rich, evidence-based lessons from the programme’s experiences with regional agents. This has been in part due to the inability of the existing RFLP monitoring and reporting system and log-frame to capture outcomes and the lack of fully articulated strategies for the interventions conducted. However, country teams and the PMO have accumulated informal but important lessons on successes and weaknesses that would be valuable to others within and outside the programme. The RFLP should then:

**Recommendation 8:**

Begin to share the experiences of the RFLP now, both the successes and shortcomings, internally among the PCOs, and with the RFLP governing bodies, ministry officials, regional organizations and donors, to help improve performance, disseminate lessons and develop roots for the programme’s sustainability. And, in the next three months, with the longer-term strategic plans developed (Recommendation 7), create and implement with the help of external training intervention-specific M&E plans that will capture outcomes for learning and lesson-sharing for the programme and its partners.

**For AECID on effectiveness and sustainability**

215 Given (a) the delays in the RFLP’s initiation, its effective implementation of only a little more than one year and the time it would thus require to generate solid results and lessons for sharing, and (b) the additional resources that would become available from reducing the number of outputs and focusing implementation on selected communities, and (c) the RFLP’s need to re-orient some of its strategies, the MTE recommends that AECID:

**Recommendation 9:**

Provide a six-month, no-cost extension to the RFLP to better enable it to generate outcomes, impacts and models, and permit it to allocate some of its funds to: 1) address higher-level policy and legal gaps in national co-management frameworks so that small-scale fisher groups may be more empowered in the long-term, and (2) strengthen in a concerted manner the capacity of local government institutions to sustain the programme and develop improved livelihoods for SSF communities.

**To FAO on quality of project and programme design**

216 The RFLP faced numerous challenges in implementation due to the inadequate design of the programme, and numerous evaluations of development projects have concluded that good project/programme planning is critical for strong effectiveness. While the MTE

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recognizes that efforts are currently underway in FAO to develop design standards, it is important to stress that the organization should:

**Recommendation 10:**

Develop rigorous and clear standards and requirements for the design of projects and programmes (including for relevance, contextual assessment, government ownership, SMART\textsuperscript{14} objectives, the feasibility of strategies, M&E and other elements) along with guidance material for staff to meet them, and the institutional processes within FAO where the Project Review Committee will use the standards to review projects/programmes and OED will use them to evaluate the initiatives.

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\textsuperscript{14} Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented and Time-bound