



STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING INFORMATION
ON STATUS AND TRENDS OF CAPTURE
FISHERIES



THE FISHCODE-STF PROJECT

Background

Responsible fisheries management has become a main concern to policy and decision makers recognising the increasing threats to ecosystem diversity and productivity and to the sustainable contribution of aquatic resources to the nutritional, economic and social well-being of the world's growing population. To give guidance to policy-makers, the "Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries" (CCRF) was developed by FAO and adopted by its Member States in 1995. Together with its Technical Guidelines and related International Plans of Action (IPOAs), the CCRF has become a widely accepted global standard defining principles and methods for developing and managing fisheries and aquaculture in a sustainable manner. In order to facilitate the implementation of the CCRF, FAO Fisheries Department set up a special programme for global partnerships promoting responsible fisheries: FishCode. The programme serves as a means through which partnership initiatives supporting the CCRF can be implemented drawing on the know-how and experience of FAO.

Guiding principles, however, are not enough for achieving responsible fisheries management. Sound decisions have to be based on accurate and relevant information and knowledge of fisheries and fishery resources. Based on recommendations by the Advisory Committee on Fisheries Research (ACFR), a proposal was developed to improve the way fishery status and trends information is assembled and disseminated. The proposal was discussed in an FAO Technical Consultation in 2002 and the "Strategy for Improving Information on Status and Trends of Capture Fisheries" (Strategy-STF) was adopted by the 25th Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2003.

The Strategy-STF is a voluntary instrument that applies to all States and entities. Its overall objective is to provide a framework for the improvement of knowledge and understanding of fishery status and trends as a basis for fisheries policy-making and sustainable management. The Strategy-STF will be implemented through agreements between States, directly or through Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) and arrangements, and FAO.

COFI at its 25th Session recognized the need for extra-budgetary support for implementation of the Strategy-STF and accordingly endorsed a proposal to develop a multilateral project under the FAO FishCode Programme as a means to accomplish this. Three Members have so far committed funds in support of the FishCode-STF Project and its first component – "Development of Inventories, Methodologies and Operational Guidelines" – became operational in November 2004.

The Strategy-STF

The need for good information on status and trends of fisheries is stated in the CCRF and in other international instruments concerning fisheries. Accurate and appropriate knowledge of fisheries and fishery resources, including socio-economic aspects, is a prerequisite for sound policy-making and responsible fisheries management and governance.

The Strategy-STF applies to the assembly and dissemination of information on fishery status and trends at the national, regional and global levels while data collection for research needs are established by other international fisheries instruments. Nevertheless, the Strategy-STF is expected to strengthen research indirectly through capacity building in developing countries.

The main focus of the Strategy-STF is fishery resources and the primary fisheries sector. It covers all capture fisheries in inland and marine waters and all types of fishing operations. However, it does not apply to aquaculture because of the different requirements of the sector.

The Strategy-STF was developed within the context of the CCRF and its main objective is “to provide a framework for the improvement of knowledge and understanding of fishery status and trends as a basis for fisheries policy making and management”¹. Within the Strategy-STF, high priority is given to capacity building and the provision of technical assistance to developing countries. Furthermore, the particular requirements of the small-scale fisheries sector are emphasised because of its importance to food security and poverty reduction. The Strategy-STF supports the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation agreed on at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) by contributing better information for monitoring the time-bound goals set for fisheries, i.e. regarding the implementation of the IPOAs on IUU fishing and capacity, restoration of depleted stocks, application of an ecosystem approach, and the establishment of “representative networks” of marine protected areas².

The Strategy-STF will be implemented by working cooperatively through agreements between States, RFBs and FAO. These arrangements will be established at different geographical levels and coordinated with the assistance of FAO. Whenever possible, use should be made of existing organisations for cooperation.

The Strategy-STF provides a list of required actions for the achievement of its objective. These actions cover different issues and considerations and can be summarised as follows:

- Developing countries needs for financial and technical assistance should be addressed and *capacity building* is necessary, both at national level and with regard to RFBs, to ensure their participation in the Strategy-STF.
- *Small-scale and multi-species* fisheries are often poorly monitored and appropriate methods should be developed for improving the information on these fisheries.
- The scope of the information collected should be expanded to include the effects of climatic, environment and socio-economic factors on fishery conservation and management in order to allow for the *incorporation of ecosystem considerations into fisheries management*. Indicators of sustainable development should also be developed.

¹ Strategy-STF paragraph 12.

² FishCode webpage “Component Briefs” and FAO 2003.

- The Strategy-STF will be instrumental in the preparation of a complete *inventory of the world's fisheries and fish stocks*. Definitions, forms, methods and other tools have to be developed for carrying out such an inventory in the FAO Fisheries Global Information System (FIGIS). A process for scientific oversight of the status and trends information should also be established.
- Criteria and methods should be developed to ensure the *quality and security of status and trends information*. These criteria and methods should comply with already agreed international standards and practices for data verification.
- Provision of data should be facilitated and *exchange of information on status and trends* should be promoted.
- *Working groups* of fisheries experts should be set up to assess the status and trends of fish stocks and fisheries and to promote quality and transparency of scientific information.
- The *sustainability* of data collection, analysis and reporting should be ensured and States should monitor their systems accordingly.

The FishCode-STF Project

In order to assist the implementation of the Strategy-STF, a multilateral project was formulated under the FAO FishCode Programme, the *FishCode-STF Project*. The Project became operational in November 2004. The development objective of the Project is the same as for the FishCode Programme, i.e. increased economic, social and nutritional benefits obtained from fisheries, through the adoption of responsible fisheries management and resource conservation policies and practices.

The Project will support the implementation of the Strategy-STF globally but places special emphasis on capacity-building in developing countries and regions. The direct beneficiaries will be national fisheries statistical units, research institutes and fishery administrations who will have their capacities strengthened and enhanced in addition to having access to better information on status and trends. It is also expected that national and international actors at regional and global levels will benefit from improved information and, in some cases, capacity building.

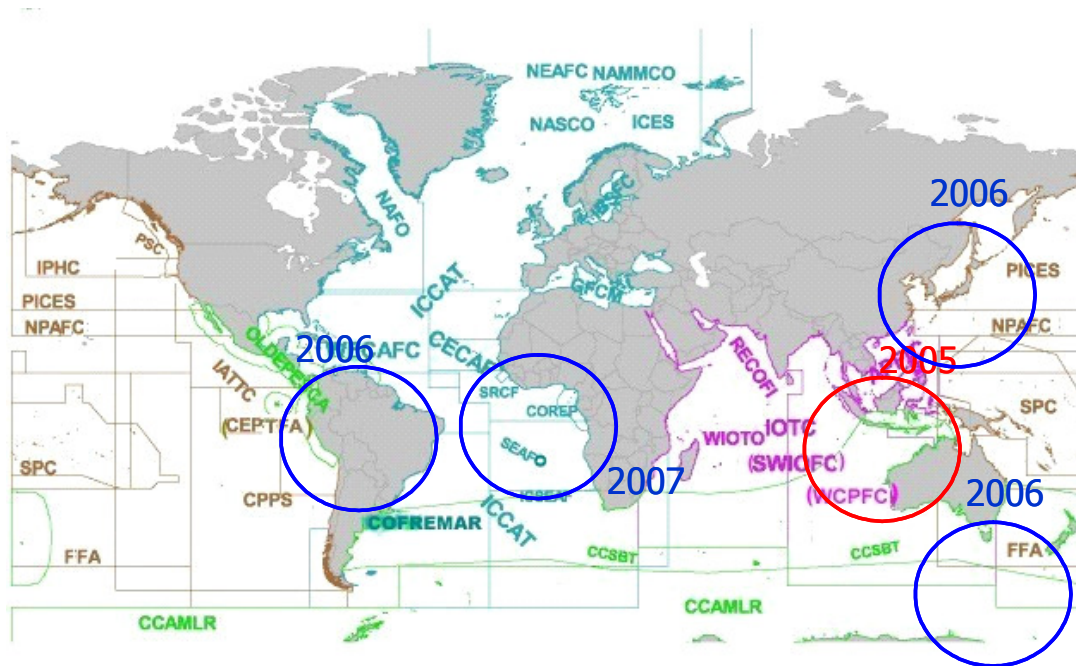
The Project will address the “Required actions” described in the Strategy-STF document, i.e.:

- Capacity-building in developing countries.
- Setting up a global inventory of fish stocks and fisheries.
- Development of appropriate data collection systems for small-scale and multi species fisheries.
- Development of criteria and methods for ensuring information quality and security.
- Development of arrangements for the provision and exchange of information.
- Sustaining data collection and information systems.
- Expanding the scope of information on status and trends of fisheries, including the need to incorporate ecosystem considerations into fisheries management.
- Participation in working groups in assessing the status and trends of fisheries.

All activities of the FishCode STF project are field-oriented and distributed over Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific. The beneficiary States are selected from developing countries with substantial capture fisheries, either inland or marine.

The FishCode-STF Project is designed to be implemented region wise. In each geographical region the project in cooperation with a major Regional Fisheries Body (RFB) carries out an **inventory of methodologies used in data collection, identifies gaps and develops and implements a field programme for improvement of data collection systems.**

Since its inception in November 2004 the project started its activities in three regions: in SE Asia in collaboration with SEAFDEC, in Central America in collaboration with OSPESCA, in the Pacific in collaboration with SPC and in China with CFS. In 2007, the project proposes to start activities in West Africa in collaboration with CECAF and its sub regional bodies.



MARINE FISHERIES

Regional workshops and inventories

The regional workshops of the project are aiming at:

- 1) Preparation of country reviews and a regional synthesis and comparative analysis of major aspects of fisheries data and information systems in the selected region;
- 2) Recommendations on future directions and immediate follow-up actions, including those related to information needs, areas for improvement, and needs for capacity building within the region.
- 3) Recommendations for pilot activities to test new monitoring systems within the region.

Strengthening of fisheries monitoring and Capacity building through field activities

The recommendations of the regional workshops are used to design a field programme aiming at improving data collection systems and capacity building at all levels. Field activities

therefore are not pre-defined and are developed according to priorities provided by expert from the regions. The first two regional workshops recommended field activities related to:

- Establishment or strengthening regional working groups on fisheries statistics of the RFBs involved
- Development of minimum requirements and standard definitions for fisheries statistics
- Support in the development of monitoring systems for small scale fisheries, which include socio economics and livelihood aspects
- Support for regional exchange of information and expertise on small scale fisheries
- Support for small pilot projects aiming at improving specific aspects of national fisheries monitoring systems
- Support for the development of simple indicators for small scale multi species fisheries

In most countries it is virtually impossible for the project to train directly all staff involved in statistical data collection. Therefore the basic approach will be to make use of regional expertise through the Regional Fisheries bodies, and then provide project support at national and/or sub-regional level for courses to larger numbers of national staff.

There is also a need for improved interaction between fishery statisticians, fisheries analysts, socio-economists and fish stock assessment experts. The project facilitates this interaction.

SMALL SCALE FISHERIES

Results from the first three regional workshops indicated that there is a large lack of information on small scale fisheries. In a large number of countries reliable basic information on their numbers, distribution, fishing techniques and production level is lacking. This is in line with the conclusions of STF-Strategy (art 24), which recognized that many small-scale and multi-species fisheries, particularly in developing countries, are not well monitored, are probably underestimated and consequently not adequately considered in the development of plans and policies for fisheries

Therefore a substantial part of the field activities are focussed on strengthening of basic data collection of small scale fisheries.

Placing small scale fisheries in a wider context of food security and poverty alleviation the assessment of the causal factors of poverty and vulnerability for small-scale fishing communities is vital if effective fisheries-specific strategies for food security and poverty alleviation are to be developed. Unfortunately, few methods to assess small scale fisheries within the context of food security, poverty vulnerability and sustainable resource use are available, despite them being urgently needed.

Realising the importance of Small Scale Fisheries, FAO and WorldFish Center decided to develop a joint programme to improve the assessment of small scale fisheries. The programme will develop new tools for assessing sustainability, provide new guidelines for making the lives of people dependent on SSF more resilient to change (ecological, social, or economic), and improve the capacity of the countries to assess and manage their fisheries.

To launch this programme The FishCode–STF project and WorldFish Center (WFC) took the initiative and organised in September 2005 an international Workshop on interdisciplinary

assessment of Small Scale Fisheries. This as a first step in developing a collaborative project towards capacity-building for small-scale fisheries assessment in developing countries. As a result of the workshop and its recommendations an elaborative workplan has been formulated which includes:

- Further development of the assessment framework, and within it methods and indicators of management performance;
- Synthesis and awareness raising,
- Field Testing / Case studies in a range of countries to validate and refine the framework and indicators; and
- capacity building in assessment and management of SSF in developing countries. These work packages are briefly described below.

The FishCode-STF project will be actively involved in this programme.

INLAND FISHERIES

Due to their specific characteristics and relations with freshwater resources management, inland fisheries are treated as a separate but complementary component vis-a-vis the marine small-scale fisheries project component. The new FAO technical guidelines on small scale fisheries will form the starting point for project activities related to inland small-scale fisheries, along with the recommendations provided by the Ad-hoc Expert Consultation on New Approaches for the Improvement of Inland Capture Fishery Statistics (Udon Thani, Thailand, September 2002). The inland fisheries component of the FishCode-STF Project will include *inter alia* the following:

- Review of the current status of resources monitoring and management, including socio-economic and environmental aspects, in order to help identify information gaps and needs related to:
 - policy decisions and development agency interventions;
 - rapid appraisal methods and sustainability of collection systems; and
 - collation/dissemination of existing information.
- Develop technical guidelines on alternative approaches for assessment of inland fisheries.
- Organise in collaboration with the FAO- Addressing the Quality of Information on Inland Fisheries project (AQUIIF) an international workshop on data collection requirement, evaluation of alternative assessment methods (including GIS based methods) and setting the roadmap for further support in Africa, SE Asia and the Americas
- Raise awareness on the proper validation of importance of inland fisheries
- Conduct of field studies to test alternative approaches
- Field oriented capacity building in developing countries

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS AND EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION ON STATUS AND TRENDS

Next to regional, national or topic related activities the project will implement the following activities at global level:

- Support to the development of criteria and methods for ensuring information quality and security
- Support to a global inventory of fish stocks and fisheries
- Support to a global inventory of monitoring systems
- Support to institutional developments and development of arrangements for the provision and exchange of information

Underpinned by the Coordinating Working Party (CWP), and building on the FIGIS global information management framework and platform, the Project aims for synergies between STF's global goals and the regional activities. It contributes where necessary to development of arrangements, methodologies, guidelines and tools at global level and further support their tailoring at regional and national levels through the above mentioned regional workshops. This strategy seeks at ensuring that these instruments actually respond to needs expressed locally.