



Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme

SFLP Activities

The contribution of fisheries research to the improvement of livelihoods of livelihoods in West African fisheries communities

Background

In most West African countries management strategies and systems endow central administration with major prerogatives in fisheries planning and management. These systems offer very little opportunity for fisheries communities to participate in the decision-making and policy formulation process.

In the few countries where policies to decentralise the management of natural resources have been introduced, the measures taken at the local level are still not very effective.

There is a pressing need to improve management systems. This improvement will necessitate the creation of an enabling environment for the promotion of resource management partnerships between the State and fisheries communities. Co-management should particularly promote a better appreciation of the needs and aspirations of the communities and strengthen the capacities of the State to carry out its fundamental duties, which include, *inter alia*, the provision of an appropriate legal framework, guarantee training for stakeholders, the collection and processing of biological, economic, social and environmental data.

This last duty comes within the particular ambit of fisheries research. However, this is one field that is most strongly affected by the institutional constraints with which the fisheries sector, and more especially small-scale sub-sector, is contending. For a long time research programs only covered the monitoring of the resource and technological aspects, relegating to second place both the socio-economic aspects of fisheries communities as well as the environmental aspects that determine, to a large extent, the sustainability of resources. In addition to this, generally, the research institutes and the centres have in the past only conducted basic studies, which have not often met the complex needs of the sector.

Improvement of links between research, policy and users.

The links between small-scale fisheries communities, policies that affect livelihoods and research are weak. This weakness marginalizes both policy and research and does not enable them to respond to the needs of the communities. It is within this context that a workshop financed the Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (SFLP) was organised in Dakar (Senegal) in November 1999 by the Support Unit for International Fishery and Aquatic Research (SIFAR) for member countries of the Sub-Regional Commission on Fisheries (SRCF). This workshop focused on improving the linkages between research, policy and users.

The second meeting of the SFLP Steering Committee held in Cotonou (Benin) in February 2001 recommended that future SFLP activities take into account the conclusions of the Dakar workshop. This workshop recognized the need for linkages between research, stakeholders and public policies. It concluded by drawing up a draft research project whose main objective is to maximise the involvement of members of fisheries communities, especially the poorest groups, in the development of policies that affect their livelihoods, and in defining the knowledge requisite to the formulation of such policies.

Since the inception of SFLP, considerable effort has been made by the Regional Support Unit (RSU) and National Coordination Units (NCUs) to build up capacities with the aim of enhancing the involvement of stakeholders in planning and management through participatory diagnostics using the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA).

Despite the outcomes some grey areas subsist in relation to the concerns of the communities on the one hand, and to information required by the decision-makers on the other. It was considered important to carry out an evaluation of the past contribution of fisheries research in the decision-making process for resource management and poverty alleviation within the small-scale fisheries communities. This was to lead to the identification of possible actions leading to improvement. Six countries of the region were selected to carry out the study on research: Cameroon, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria and Senegal.

To launch the study, the SFLP organised in October 2001 a **planning workshop** [[Read online 249 Ko](#)] or [[Download 46K zip](#)] in Cotonou where a methodology and expected outcomes were defined with the collaboration of the six countries

The work was executed by national consultants identified from amongst researchers from fishery research centres of the 6 selected countries under the supervision of the Regional Support Unit (RSU). The study covered the following activities:

1. Evaluation of the available potential for research, developments over the past years and its contribution, if any, to the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA).
2. Identification of research's knowledge about traditional resource management and knowledge.
3. Study of the impact of research policies, institutions and processes (PIP) on fisheries communities' livelihoods, with particular emphasis on the participation of stakeholders in the decision-making process including in management systems.
4. Analysis of existing linkages between research, public policies and communities depending partially or totally on fishing.
5. Evaluation of the contribution of research, including research in social sciences to the decision-making process for fisheries management and to the improvement of fishing community livelihoods.
6. Analysis of existing linkages between fisheries research institutions and other institutions that carry out research in social sciences (research centres, NGOs, universities, etc.).
7. Diagnosis of problems encountered by research in enhancing fisheries

communities' livelihoods and identification of possible improvements.

8. On the basis of the results of studies conducted in each country, preparation of community projects designed to strengthen the contribution of research to poverty alleviation in small-scale fisheries communities.

In June 2002, the multidisciplinary national research teams of Cameroon, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria and Senegal gathered in Cotonou to validate the report of their studies on the contribution of research in improving the livelihoods of small scale fisheries communities conducted in their respective countries:

Cameroon	[Read 511 K]	or	[Download 93 K zip]
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Mali	[Read 119 K]	or	[Download 28 K zip]
Mauritania	[Read 281 K]	or	[Download 135 K zip]
Nigeria	[Read 424 K]	or	[Download 90 K zip]
Senegal	[Read 111 K]	or	[Download 30 K zip]

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The plenary sessions provided opportunities for the different national teams to present their findings and exchange views on the role of fisheries research in poverty reduction. Each team also worked in group sessions to formulate their advisory notes to policy makers in their different countries on priority issues identified. The presentation of these notes revealed that most had a number of recommendations in common. These include: (i) the need for fisheries research to be based on the request of the communities; (ii) the need for more funding for fisheries research, and (iii) the need for more consultation in the policy-making process.

Participants also unanimously recognised the potentials of a sub-regional network/cooperation for promoting fisheries research and information exchange. National teams are expected to finalise their recommendations as soon as possible and take necessary steps to move actions on the priorities identified forward in their respective countries

Cameroon	[Read 373 K] -	[Download 346 K zip]
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Mauritania	[Read 29 K] -	[Download 6 K zip]

The key issues that emerge from the six detailed country studies, the lessons learned and the main recommendations to improve the contribution of research are presented in the final report. [\[Read 427 K\]](#) - [\[Download 46 K zip\]](#).

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