



# Small scale fisheries and access rights in Timor-Leste

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# Timor-Leste, a small island nation

## Factsheet

- Continent: Asia
- Area: 14,874 km<sup>2</sup>
  - Capital: Dili
- Population: 1,066,582
- Official Languages: Portuguese and Tetun

# Context

- Consultative process of developing a new National Fisheries Strategy (NFS) for Timor-Leste, lead by
- the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (Go DRTL), through its General Directorate of Fisheries (DGP). The NFS has the vision of
- Timor-Leste's marine fisheries provide for sustainable livelihoods, incomes and employment, and contribute significantly to food and nutrition security while marine living aquatic resources and coastal environs are safeguarded for future generations”.

# Objectives

Overall objective:

- “Responsible, sustainable and equitable management of fisheries and living aquatic resources based on a co-management arrangement and complying with regional and international laws, voluntary instruments, agreements and covenants”.



# Objectives

Specific objective 1:

- "Co-management of marine resources by small scale and artisanal fishers, their families and communities represented socio-politically by legitimate basic democratic organizations, facilitating ownership and in compliance with legal and regulatory provisions, in concert with GoDRTL competent authorities", and

# Objectives

Specific objective 2:

- "GoDRTL competent authorities exercise their sovereign function of providing and enforcing a legal and regulatory framework conducive to co-management of marine resources in the EEZ for the benefit of the Timorese people, together with artisanal fishers, their families and communities".

# Timor-Leste's marine fisheries

- is made up by small-scale and artisanal vessels; small-scale and artisanal effort is restricted to shelf area of the country's EEZ, with focus on reef fisheries and fish aggregation devices (FADs);
- does not have a domestic commercial/off-shore fishing fleet;
- estimated losses from IUU fishing to the nation at some USD 40 million/year;
- play only a limited role in the national economy;



# BUT

- small scale and artisanal fisheries support livelihoods in coastal communities in terms of income, employment creation, diversification of production and livelihood resilience;
- in more remote coastal rural areas, coastal fisheries are considered an important driver of economic growth, and a major source of food security and nutrition, via markets as well as via direct consumption;
- gathering (gleaning) of marine aquatic organisms in shallow waters (including by women and youth) provides for supplementary household income, as well as improving household food and nutrition security.

# Sector management

Legal and policy aspects:

- dominance of the goals of sustainability of resource utilization, preservation of species diversity and protection of coastal and marine environments e.g. by banning destructive fishing including trawling;
- provisions for co-management arrangements allowing participation of communities and other stakeholders in resource management, with reference to the customary approach to natural resource management of tara bandu, a traditional decision making system based on social/kinship relations;

# Sector management

Most important major policy decision

- Exclusive access to the Northern EEZ for small scale and artisanal fishing as the for maintaining the contribution of small scale artisanal fisheries to income and employment, sustainable livelihoods and local economies, and food security and nutrition;
- Access to the Southern EEZ is regulated by zoning of fishing grounds, restricting (in theory) access of semi-industrial vessels but, in the absence of effective MCS, allowing for IUU fishing by foreign vessels.

# IUU fishing: a case

- In 2016, fishing licenses were issued to a foreign (Chinese) semi-industrial fishing fleet, in spite of the fact that the company operating the vessels were found guilty of IUU fishing in neighboring countries and beyond. When the vessels were found fishing selectively (and illegally) for shark and in breach of zoning regulations and prohibition of transshipments in 2017, licenses were suspended and the vessels were retained. In 2018, however, the vessels were released to leave Timorese jurisdiction, complete with the illegal catch.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-30/million-dollar-illegal-catch-forgotten/9925890>

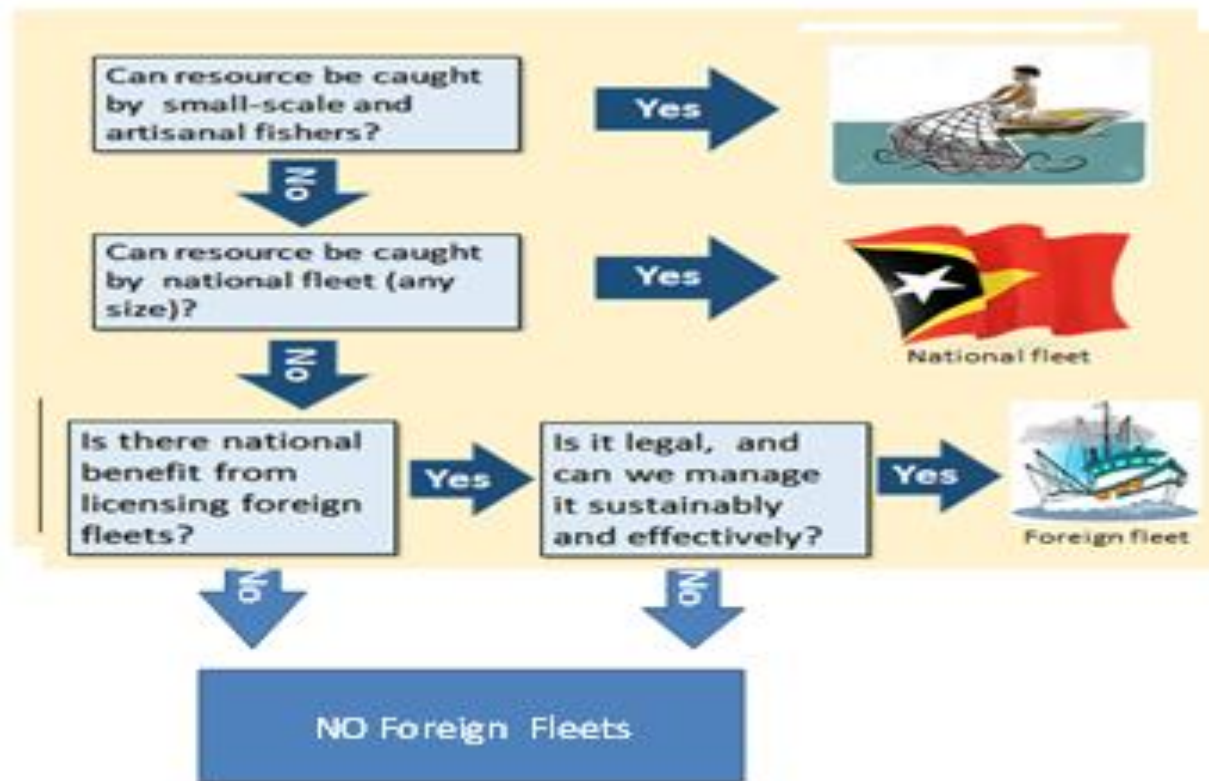
# Lessons learned

For the NFS, **policy principles** have been formulated based on the cited above:

- all Timorese fisheries resources which can be caught by small scale and artisanal fishers should be caught by small scale and artisanal fishers, and
- all Timorese fisheries resources which can be caught by Timorese fishers should be caught by Timorese fishers. The principles have been visualized in the following diagram:



# The “decision diagram”



# Policy choices

- Maintaining exclusive access of small scale and artisanal fisheries to the Northern EEZ and, possibly, extending their *de jure* and ensuring their *de facto* exclusive access beyond present zoning in the Southern EEZ, which
- would yield optimal socioeconomic benefits in terms of coastal livelihoods and spurring of local economies. At the same time this policy would foster chances of improving food security and nutrition benefits given that, in all likelihood, catches would be landed in supply of domestic markets.

# Policy choices

- Compared to this, licensing either domestic or foreign semi-industrial and/or industrial vessels, even under the conditions pointed out in the diagram above, would yield no such positive impacts. As the Timorese market provides little incentives for, in particular foreign vessels, to land their catches, semi-industrial or industrial fishing will create neither significant impacts in terms of local supplies and food security and nutrition nor provide income and employment on shore.

# Policy choices

- At the same time, effective and sustained MCS effort would be required, incurring substantial investment and recurrent costs. Thus, while causing probable damage to resource sustainability and aquatic ecosystems, the only benefits from semi-industrial and/or industrial fishing would be state revenue from license fees. As shown from the experience with licensing semi-industrial vessel outlined above, such revenues would not be in balance with the economic and ecological costs incurred to the Timorese economy

# Conclusion

- This paper argues in favor of extending exclusive access to Timor-Leste's marine resources in all of the EEZ to small scale and artisanal vessels;
- Regarding the policy option of licensing either domestic or foreign semi-industrial or industrial vessels, this paper urges the need for basing policy decisions on the outcome of the assessment of its socio-, micro- and macroeconomic costs, including costs of building and maintaining effective and efficient MCS enforcement. Only if benefits clearly outweigh all costs should this option be considered