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Evaluation of FAO activities in fisheries exploitation and utilization

The importance of fisheries

Fisheries production is central to food security worldwide, and is thus central to the mandate of FAO. Global production from capture fisheries and aquaculture supplied about 101 million tonnes of food fish in 2002, providing a calculated per capita supply of 16.2 kg, with aquaculture accounting for the growth from 15.9 kg in 2000. World population has been increasing more quickly than the total food fish supply; as a result, the average per capita fish supply outside China declined from 14.6 kg in 1987 to 13.2 kg in 1992 and has since remained stable. Overall, fish provided more than 2.6 billion people with at least 20 percent of their average per capita animal protein intake. The share of fish proteins in total world animal protein supplies was about 16 percent in 2001.

The mission of FAO's Fisheries Programme

FAO's work in fisheries exploitation and utilization responds to the major problems facing capture fisheries: declining catches, overexploitation, the need to maximize the value of fish harvests and reduce waste, food insecurity and poverty in artisanal fishing communities and problems related to world trade in fish products. Most of this work is of primary interest to the needs and requests of developing country members while, in the areas of fish quality assurance and trade, there is a strong synergy between developing and developed country requirements.

Approval of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) in 1995 was a milestone in the overall approach to fisheries, and FAO's emphasis changed from increasing fish production to the introduction of more responsible fishing methods. As with virtually all work relating to fisheries, the main thrust of the work under evaluation focuses on the implementation of the CCRF itself. At the same time, the work programme is guided by FAO's Strategic Framework and the international commitments for which FAO and the Fisheries Department are responsible, including Agenda 21 and the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD).

For more than 15 years, the FAO's Fisheries Department has included a programme entitled Fisheries Exploitation and Utilization, covering fisheries technology and related activities, and fish marketing and trade. The primary focus is on marine capture fisheries – aquaculture enters the picture only for marketing and trade.

The Fisheries Industries Division (FIIT) is mainly responsible for this work and its mission statement identifies the development of fisheries technology, information, policy and strategy as major concerns. It provides advice and assistance to FAO Members and to the fisheries industry at all levels on the optimum utilization of their marine and freshwater fishery resources for direct human consumption and other uses.

FIIT is especially concerned with the transfer and adaptation of appropriate techniques and technology in catching, handling, processing, distribution and

marketing of fish and fish products and in the dissemination of information on these topics. This technical mandate concerns fish capture technology and practices, with due regard to protection of the environment and well-being of fishing communities, as well as increasing the efficiency of operations that take place between harvesting the fish and the ultimate purchase and use by the consumer. FAO develops codes and standards related to utilization and marketing and monitors their implementation. There is considerable synergy between the fishery exploitation and utilization activities in key technical areas, e.g. fishery harbours and landing sites, fish quality "from the net to the plate", creation of markets for low-value catch and bycatch, and trade issues such as ecolabelling.

The principal outputs of the Programme are related to FAO's main channels of action: information and knowledge production and dissemination, including technical information products; projects; workshops and databases; advice and training for member countries and Regional Fishery Bodies and Arrangements; and fora for international discussion through expert consultations, networks and partnerships. These activities are grouped under five Technical Projects:

- Reduction of Discards and Environmental Impact from Fisheries
- Sustainable Development of Small-scale Fisheries
- Increased Production from Underutilized Aquatic Resources and Low-value Catches
- Consumption, Safety and Quality of Fish Products
- Promotion of International Fish Trade.

Findings

The Fisheries Exploitation and Utilization Programme is a valuable contribution to FAO's response to member countries' needs and is firmly anchored in the CCRF as well as FAO's Corporate Strategies to address Members' needs. Both the Regular Programme and associated field activities were effectively implemented during the period reviewed (1997–2003).

The Programme has responded to a reasonable extent to the changing needs of the international community as expressed by the WSSD and FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI). The focus of activities was generally judged to be very good and some areas of work received increased attention, notably: i) the environmental impact of fishing operations, including discards; ii) fish quality and safety; iii) the impact of multilateral trade agreements on fish trade; and iv) vessel monitoring systems and sea safety. Staff have performed well, in spite of a heavy and increasing workload. However, the vertical structure of the concerned Divisions (indeed the Fisheries Department as a whole) has been largely untouched.

Considerable attention has been given to setting priorities, but translating those priorities into strategies for achieving particular objectives still requires effort. In view of FAO's mandate regarding poverty reduction and food security, there should be a stronger focus in the Programme on those themes and regions where the problem is most acute. FAO's new programme model, introduced in 2000, did not imply any major reorientation in subject matter or methods of working but the five Regular Programme Technical Projects all suffer from the same design problems: objectives are set at a very high level and the contribution of the outputs to their achievement is i) unverifiable and ii) based on many assumptions. The relevance of field projects to development problems was found to be high, but design was often weak due to poor formulation of requests in countries and the absence of a mechanism for correcting this early in the project implementation cycle. This having been said, the overall performance of projects in producing outputs was good.

Recommendations

Fisheries Exploitation and Utilization Programme should be restructured using the CCRF as a backbone and providing support for the common theme of promoting, implementing and adapting the Code as executable modules at regional, national and local levels. Activities in the three key thematic areas (small-scale fisheries, monitoring, control and surveillance and vessel monitoring system work, and capacity building) can all be better coordinated in a mutually supportive programme.

■ **Small-scale fisheries.** Small-scale fisheries should be the primary thematic target with particular reference to implementation of the CCRF, including enforcement of equitable access regimes. Increasing poverty and population combined with declines in nutrition and capacity suggest that Africa continues to be a primary geographical target for priority.

■ **Capture fisheries.** Many of the world's capture fisheries are seriously overexploited and there is ample evidence of a trend towards further decline. Resource depletion and the ensuing social consequences are partly driven by increasingly effective fishing technologies and globalization of world fish trade. Areas for improvement include better tailoring of strategies on fishing capacity, responsible fishing methods and fish trade; focus "hot topics" such as selectivity in trawl fisheries, the interactions between fishing gears and turtles, seabirds and marine mammals; fleet capacity; further advice on moving capacity offshore to exploit "new" grounds and species; and expanded work on reduction of bycatch.

■ **Post-harvest utilization of fish.** Greater efforts are needed to overcome the chronic lack of infrastructure, lack of awareness of fish handling requirements, deficient information on prices and trade, and low purchasing power of small-scale producers. There is an important need to maintain an adequate balance between the competing interests of international trade as opposed to concerns for internal markets and disadvantaged small-scale fishers. The latter could benefit from more training and capacity building in handling of fish, both on-board and in ports and landing sites, especially in Africa, as well as directing increased attention to technical aspects of aquaculture, including fish slaughtering, handling, processing and transport.

■ **Global trade in fish and fish products.** In addition to the current "hot topics" such as food safety standards acting as non-tariff barriers and ecolabels and traceability in labelling of products, FAO will need to support such areas as the expansion of electronic trading systems, establishment of futures markets in major internationally-traded fish commodities, and establishing norms for traditional fish products and processes through Codex. It may be important to promote actively the inclusion of a fish component in household consumption surveys.

■ **Information and training related to the CCRF.** The need for broad application of the Code is a common theme and the message needs to be diffused in different forms at different levels – the minister needs a "sound bite" that makes the TV or newspaper headline, the fisheries college instructor needs a class module, while the district administrator needs guidance on how to apply the Code in terms of local by-laws. Networks of centres of excellence twinning developing and developed country institutions should be promoted.

■ **Enforcement of fisheries management plans through monitoring, control and surveillance and the vessel monitoring system.** Management measures must be enforceable and the political will must exist to enforce regulations effectively. Advice on the vessel monitoring system must be tempered by the practical realities of enforcement and effective deterrence. FAO technical expertise continues to be essential in matters relating to vessel registers, vessel flagging, vessel and crew safety, vessel capacity measurement and International Maritime Organization affairs.

With the resources at its disposal, the Programme cannot respond adequately to many member countries and address core problems. Consequently, increased efforts are required to prioritize and optimize the use of these scarce resources. This must continue to be done in even closer coordination with other Programmes of the Fisheries Department and external partners. Mobilization of additional resources requires the active cooperation of the Fisheries and Technical Cooperation Departments.

Peer review

A panel of external international experts reviewed the evaluation conclusions and endorsed both the timeliness and the quality of the evaluation. While noting their broad agreement with the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation, the panel members nonetheless added their own clarifications. They noted that a number of issues raised by the evaluation go beyond FIIT and reflect on broader questions of strategy, cross-cutting approach, priority setting and resource allocation relevant to the Department as a whole, and they encouraged the Department to consider these.

The panel felt that it was important to identify the Fisheries Department's specific capabilities and potential for adding value, such as taking the lead on concepts and global perspectives. However, it noted that Programme design has been essentially unchanged for over a decade and recommended that this should be reviewed within the context of any future strategic planning exercise, with particular emphasis on links to FAO's Strategic Framework, the Millennium Development Goals and the WSSD targets. They also emphasized the need to identify causal linkages between Programme objectives, outputs and activities and apply verifiable indicators of impact. The panel agreed with the recommendation for more focus on small-scale fisheries and suggested developing a more complete "value chain" perspective linking production, people, technology and value from the resource to the market, widening understanding at the level of policy-makers, technical agents, development specialists, consumers and producers.

Management response to the evaluation

Management was very appreciative of this evaluation and the methodology used. It had already embarked on a strategic planning exercise within the Fisheries Department. It was noted that the results of the questionnaire sent out to 50 countries should be treated with an element of caution as the priorities expressed were at variance with those of FAO's Governing Bodies, in particular with regard to the low importance given to trade issues and to safety at sea. Also, regarding the recommendation to create a small-scale fisheries Sub-Committee of COFI, management noted that the Department had already been mandated by COFI to make this a programmatic priority, and a task force had been set up.

FAO Governing Bodies' conclusions (Programme Committee)

The Programme Committee appreciated the quality, thorough coverage and the transparent process of the report, and its placement within the context of the CCRF. The Committee found that it made convincing recommendations and generally concurred with them, including the need to increase the focus on small-scale fisheries and capacity building. Some members expressed concern regarding limited country coverage of the questionnaire surveys. The Committee noted that the management response did not agree fully with certain recommendations and felt that it was the responsibility of FAO management to decide the best way to implement the recommendations. In this connection, the Committee requested a follow-up report after two years, describing how the evaluation recommendations had been implemented.

References

Evaluation of FAO activities in fisheries exploitation and utilization (Programme 2.3.3) PC 91/5.

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