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REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING INFORMATION ON STATUS AND TRENDS OF CAPTURE FISHERIES

SUMMARY

The document briefly describes the background to the FAO Strategy for Improving Information on Status and Trends of Capture Fisheries (Strategy–STF), adopted by COFI at its 25th Session. The Strategy is a voluntary instrument that provides countries with a framework for the improvement of knowledge and understanding of fishery status and trends as a basis for fisheries policy-making and management for the conservation and sustainable use of fishery resources within ecosystems. Possible instruments for the implementation of the Strategy–STF at the regional level are presented. As highlighted in the Annex, there is ample scope for improvement of fishery data quality in the CECAF area. The Committee is invited to comment upon the relevance and importance or otherwise of the Strategy–STF in the CECAF region and, in particular, to identify priority areas for attention.

IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION ON STATUS AND TRENDS OF CAPTURE FISHERIES

1. Objective, reliable and credible information on the status and trends of capture fisheries is the foundation of policy development for fisheries, and of fisheries management actions. There are many legal instruments that require such information, including the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Law of the Sea, the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, FAO Code of

Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and recently adopted FAO International Plans of Action.

2. For decades, the FAO Secretariat has compiled information on the status and trends of fisheries, and such reports have been received by COFI[1] with great interest. Similar reports are prepared by some countries, and by regional fisheries bodies, for the fisheries under their jurisdictions.

3. Information on the status and trends of fisheries has, in part, stimulated important initiatives to make fisheries more responsible. For example, concerns about clear signs of over-exploitation of important fish stocks prompted COFI to undertake preparation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (See Annex 1, Paragraph 2 of the Code). Similarly, concerns about excess fishing capacity prompted COFI to undertake preparation of an International Plan of Action for the Management of Fishing Capacity (see Paragraphs 1 and 3 of the Plan). COFI was responding to evidence of over-exploitation and excess capacity contained in reports on the status and trends of fisheries, and related documents.

4 At the national and regional level, information on the status and trends of fisheries has also stimulated important initiatives to make fisheries more responsible.

5. Some of the uses of information on the status and trends of fisheries at the national and regional levels, are to:

- facilitate preparation of fishery management and conservation plans in pursuit of sustainable fisheries, food security and improved social and economic benefits;
- facilitate monitoring of implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries;
- affirm government and regional commitment to responsible fisheries;
- improve transparency at national and regional levels;
- improve knowledge of the contribution and status of different components of the fisheries sector, including small scale and subsistence fisheries;
- support policy-making and management with a wider scope of fishery information, including environmental and socio-economic information;
- help States fulfill their obligations under international agreements;
- improve monitoring of shared, straddling and highly migratory stocks;
- allow comparisons of approaches taken by different States or regions, including comparison of assessment and management approaches and results; and
- facilitate coordination amongst regional fishery bodies.

6. Information on the status and trends of fisheries is of great interest to the news media and the public. Ultimately, fishery policy makers and fisheries managers must be responsive to public opinion, which is shaped by information on the status and trends of fisheries. Therefore, it is critically important that such information be objective, reliable, understandable, and as complete as possible.

NEED TO IMPROVE INFORMATION ON STATUS AND TRENDS

[1] FAO Committee on Fisheries

7. Some of the issues that may raise concern about the current approach for assembling and disseminating information on the status and trends of fisheries and which can be much improved include transparency, quality assurance, credibility, comprehensiveness, scope of information, and partnerships between organizations and scientists at the local, national and regional levels which could make valuable contributions on the status and trends of fisheries.

8. Ultimately, information on status and trends of fisheries, at the local, national, regional, and global levels, depends on the quality of the data and assessments that are available for individual fisheries or resources. The needs, and responsibility, for collecting data and conducting assessments of resource status are articulated in many instruments, including national legislation in most countries, the conventions of regional fisheries bodies, and other international instruments such as the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. Also the FAO Constitution requires FAO Members to provide to the Secretariat certain statistical, technical and other information.

9. However, there are problems of data quality in many countries and regions, and many stocks are not assessed. Needs for data and assessments are most problematic for developing countries, particularly the least developed among them, because of inadequate financial and technical resources. A summary of the status of capture fishery statistics for the CECAF area as reported to FAO is provided in Annex 1. It is noteworthy that the proportion of catches reported at the individual species level increased markedly in the 1970s and 1980s at a time when the CECAF Project was in operation.

10. Problems with data quality and assessments need to be addressed by renewed commitment to fulfil existing instruments that articulate the needs. Developing countries require financial and technical assistance for capacity building so that they can fulfil their own needs, as well as contribute to regional and global information on the status and trends of fisheries.

11. Effort has been expended on capacity building for data collection and processing (e.g. using ARTFISH[2)] through many TCP projects in the region, and most of these have had positive impacts as acknowledged by countries. However, as recognized by COFI, much remains to be done and that is why a strategy was developed to provide a framework for future concerted efforts to improve information on status and trends of capture fisheries, which would hopefully attract reinvigorated donor support.

THE STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING INFORMATION ON STATUS AND TRENDS OF CAPTURE FISHERIES

12. The 2003 FAO Strategy for Improving Information on Status and Trends of Capture Fisheries (Strategy–STF) was adopted by consensus at the Twenty-fifth Session of COFI (February 2003) and endorsed by the Hundred and Twenty-fourth Session of the FAO Council (June 2003). UNGA Resolution A/58/L.18 adopted in December 2003 on sustainable fisheries invited States to support the implementation of the FAO Strategy-STF at national and regional levels, giving particular attention to capacity-building in developing countries.

[2] ARTFISH is a suite of standardized statistical approaches and computer software developed by FAO-FIDI for sample-based fishery surveys.

13. The Strategy–STF is a voluntary instrument that applies to all States and entities. Its overall objective is to provide a framework, strategy and plan for the improvement of knowledge and understanding of fishery status and trends as a basis for fisheries policy-making and management for the conservation and sustainable use of fishery resources within ecosystems. It does not deal with data gathering in isolation but rather addresses the whole process chain from data collection, through data processing, validation, and analysis to the preparation of policy and management advice so as to ensure that the right data are collected and used effectively at the national and regional levels.

14. The Strategy–STF is a key to sound policy making and responsible fisheries management. It has been elaborated within the framework of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries; it is global in scope and is designed to cover all capture fisheries in inland and marine waters, including all industrial, commercial, subsistence and recreational fisheries[3], and it is founded on solid principles.

15. The Strategy–STF specifies actions required in the following nine areas :

- Need for capacity-building[4] in developing countries;
- Data collection systems in small-scale fisheries and multispecies fisheries;
- Expanding the scope of information on status and trends of fisheries;
- Global inventory of fish stocks and fisheries;
- FIGIS[5] participation, structuring and capacity-building;
- Development of criteria and methods for ensuring information quality and security;
- Development of arrangements for the provision and exchange of information;
- The role of working groups in assessing the status and trends of fisheries;
- Sustaining collection of data and information on the status and trend of fisheries.

16. In its deliberations in 2003 on the proposed Strategy–STF, COFI reaffirmed that improved data and information are of fundamental importance for effective policy-making and fisheries management, essential for implementation of the Code of Conduct and central to the mandate of FAO. It was recalled that ACFR[6] at its Session in December 2002 considered that the Strategy is now even more necessary following the WSSD[7] (Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August – 4 September 2002) as better information will be needed to monitor progress towards time bound goals for fisheries. COFI also stressed that high priority should be given to capacity-building and the provision of technical assistance to developing countries, as emphasised in the Strategy–STF. The particular requirements for the small-scale fisheries sector were emphasised because of its importance to food security and poverty reduction.

17. Furthermore, COFI recognized the need for improved regional cooperation in improving data and information on status and trends of fisheries and the roles of regional

[3] The Strategy–STF does not apply to aquaculture, for which a similar dedicated strategy is being considered.
[4] The term “capacity building” here means strengthening human and institutional capabilities.
[5] Fisheries Global Information System
[6] FAO Advisory Committee on Fishery Research
[7] United Nations’ World Summit on Sustainable Development

fishery bodies (RFBs) (such as CECAF) and FAO as stated in the Strategy–STF. In this regard, the important role of FIGIS in support of the Strategy was noted. FIGIS enables the more systematic assembly of status and trends data and information from the national to the regional and global levels was noted. Many Members renewed their commitments to supply or make readily available information on their fisheries and to participate in the Strategy. Several Members expressed their desire that FAO provide assistance on methodology and training. It was noted that in relation to inland fisheries in developing countries, a major effort would be required.

18. COFI recognized the need for additional funding requirements for implementation of the Strategy and endorsed the proposal to seek extra-budgetary funds from donors for projects implementing the Strategy under FAO's FishCode Programme. FAO has accordingly developed a document outlining the FishCode STF Project, which has been made available to prospective donors. Three Members have so far committed funds in support of the Project and workplan details are being elaborated. It is expected that the Project will become operational during 2004.

ASSISTING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY–STF THROUGH THE FISHCODE PROGRAMME

Project components

19. The overall FishCode STF Project is designed to execute these actions through two main components, as follows:

- Component 1: "Development of inventories, methodologies and operational guidelines."
- Component 2: "Field training and implementation."

20. The two components are intended to overlap, such that some of the outputs of Component 1 (e.g. inventories) will be utilized for the organization and implementation of activities under Component 2. The Project Document currently provides details on the work plan and budget for Component 1, for which funds have already been secured. This component has a mainly normative orientation but includes key field testing activities. Donor funding will be actively sought for Component 2 once Component 1 operations are underway.

Component 1: Development of inventories, methodologies and operational guidelines

21. This component covers the creation of methodological descriptions of fishery statistical and data collection systems used by all countries and regional fisheries bodies. At the same time it should provide an overview of fish stocks and/or fisheries management units, whether monitored or not, by country and/or region. The aim of this exercise, to be executed mainly by correspondence and through questionnaires, is to obtain a complete picture of all systems in use and all stocks or management units monitored, so as to identify gaps in monitoring and above all to assess the quality of the systems used. The main inventory will cover data systems on all aspects of fisheries, including data on resources, fleets, employment, processing, consumption, trade and social and economic aspects. This will also facilitate an evaluation of data collection and handling practices by country, the flows of data from national to regional (including CECAF) and global levels and hence of the data as published by regional fisheries bodies and FAO. Finally, it will form the basis for improvements and identification of training needs in developing countries to be addressed under Component 2.

22. The implementation of this component will take the following considerations into account:

- There is a need to develop data collection systems that are better suited to cover small-scale fisheries and multispecies fisheries and for the development of criteria and methods for ensuring information quality and security.
- Routine data collection on economic and social aspects of fisheries is often neglected and consequently managers find themselves deprived of the data necessary to take decisions in cases of conflicts between different types of fisheries, the protection of labour forces engaged in existing fisheries against new arrivals, etc. The Project will investigate requirements and develop systems for the collection of such data.
- Computerized systems facilitate the exchange of data and information and thus the setting up of large data banks such as FIGIS. The Project will develop arrangements for the provision and exchange of information and assist in making improvements to the inputs to FIGIS, including the expansion of the scope of information on status and trends of fisheries.
- Ideally fisheries should be managed based on ecosystem considerations. However, ecosystem management requires huge amounts of data. The Project will investigate the data requirements and practical solutions for such management systems.

23. Activities under Component 1 will be global (although they will be implemented on a regional basis) and will involve desk studies, questionnaires, expert consultations as well as data collection and verification missions by consultants. It is foreseen that FAO Regular Programme staff will be deeply involved in overseeing these activities, which will lead to a number of publications and computer programs as well as a substantial body of training material. The "Inventories" might lead to a weighting factor for the quality of statistical data produced by countries, regional fisheries bodies and organizations such as FAO.

Component 2: Field training and implementation at national and regional levels

24. The aim of Component 2 is to improve substantially the quality of collection and processing of fisheries statistics and other data and information on capture fisheries in selected developing countries with important inland or marine fisheries. This would lead to better data for fisheries management at national level and, in cases of stocks shared between neighbouring countries, at regional level as well. Improvements in reporting to FAO and other agencies would be an important additional benefit.

25. Component 2 covers capacity building at all levels, and implementation of improved or new statistical and other data collection and processing systems in selected countries. There is also a need for improved interaction between fishery statisticians, fisheries analysts, socio-economists and fish stock assessment experts. The Project should facilitate this interaction.

26. Activities under Component 2 will be field-oriented and distributed over Africa, the Americas and Asia. The beneficiary States will be selected from developing countries with substantial capture fisheries, either inland or marine, that have a potential of becoming an example for other countries in similar situations.

Selection of countries

27. Consistent with other projects planned under the FishCode Programme, the STF Project will use a "reference fisheries strategy" for this component. Particular reference countries will be selected on the basis of being representative of fisheries situations within a region. Distribution by FAO official languages will also be taken into account. Since only a limited number of target countries can benefit directly, selection will have to be made based on criteria established in agreement with regional fishery bodies (including CECAF), based on the size of the resources (inland and/or marine), the size of the fisher population or important subsistence fisheries with dependent communities, the relative level of development of the existing statistical system and the prospect of full implementation and maintenance after the closure of the Project. The final decision on the number of reference fisheries selected will depend upon the budget and personnel requirements to carry out the activities appropriate to each one. There will need to be a compromise between maximising the effect of the Project, either by selecting a large number of reference fisheries countries or by putting a large effort into a limited number of countries, and ensuring that the funds and personnel for each activity are sufficient to achieve the objectives.

Training strategy

28. In most countries it is virtually impossible to train directly all staff involved in statistical data collection. Therefore the basic approach will be to train first regional teams of trainers by language group, and then provide Project support at national and/or sub-regional level for courses to larger numbers of national staff. As indicated in the Guidelines for the Routine Collection of Capture Fishery Data[8], staff at all levels should participate in the training, albeit at different moments. Since participants appreciate being trained based on local situations, each theoretical course (national or sub-regional) will be followed by a practical component dealing with local data and systems. All courses/workshops should end with a meeting involving all levels of staff.

29. Throughout the Project's initial years, each team of regional trainers will receive support from an experienced resource person, in order to maintain the required level and consistency of the programme. All training courses at national and sub-regional level will require substantial inputs from the countries or regional fisheries bodies in terms of meeting the costs for accommodation and subsistence allowances of participants.

30. Training will initially be based on existing training material (guidelines, manuals, computer programs), but gradually this lecture material may be modified, building on knowledge gained through the execution of Component 1.

Implementation of new or improved statistical systems

31. Once a sufficient number of statisticians have been trained and new methods developed, the Project will start the implementation of improved or new systems in a limited number of countries that provide suitable conditions for such an undertaking and are representative of major regions and language groups. Countries should be selected carefully on the basis of experiences gained during the execution of training courses. A limited supply of hardware and software will be made available through the project to facilitate this process.

[8] FAO Fisheries Technical Paper No. 382

SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE COMMITTEE

32. The Committee is invited to comment upon the relevance and importance or otherwise of the Strategy–STF in the CECAF region and, in particular, to identify priority areas for attention and identify risks.

33. If the Strategy–STF is deemed relevant and important for the region, the Committee may also wish to provide guidance on its implementation, both through the FAO FishCode STF Project working at national and regional levels, and through national or local initiatives by FAO Members as well as development partner agencies and NGOs.

ANNEX 1

NOTE ON THE STATUS OF CAPTURE FISHERY STATISTICS FOR THE CECAF AREA AS REPORTED TO FAO

The number of countries fishing in the CECAF area submitting annual capture fishery statistics to FAO and their degree of breakdown by species can be considered as coarse indicators of the status of catch statistics data collection in the region. Both of these indicators have been showing a general decrease in recent years.

As can be seen in Table 1, in the 2002 inquiry four more coastal states submitted to FAO only partial or no data compared to the previous year. This is also reflected in an increase of the percentage of catches having to be estimated by FAO (see Table 2), which nevertheless remains significantly lower compared to some other major fishing areas.

Most of the major Distant Water Fishing Nations (DWFNs) regularly report catches from the CECAF area (Table 1). However, data for DWFNs are cross-checked and complemented by FAO with those made available by other sources [i.e., the tuna catches by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), the database of the Institut Mauritanien des Recherches Océanographiques et des Pêches (IMROP) and the Las Palmas Survey managed by the Centro Oceanografico de Canarias of the Instituto Español de Oceanografía (IEO)].

The percentage of catches reported at the species level improved markedly from 1970 to 1990 (see Table 3), probably as a result of capacity building by the CECAF Project and the publication of the FAO Species Identification Sheets for the Eastern Central Atlantic, a revision of which is expected for about 2006. In recent years the percentage of catches reported at the species level declined compared to the previous decade but there are signs of improvements, with a significant increase in 2002. In that same year, the quantities of catches reported as unspecified marine fishes decreased to 7.4% .

Table 1. Submissions of capture statistics on the CECAF area in most recent years (2000-2002 data)

Country	Complete submission	Partial submission	No submission	Data obtained from other sources
Coastal States				
Benin	01 – 02	00		
Cameroon	00 - 01 - 02			
Cape Verde	00 - 01		02	02
Congo, Dem. Rep. of the		00 - 01 - 02		
Congo, Republic of	00	01 - 02		
Côte d'Ivoire	00 - 01	02		
Equatorial Guinea		00	01 - 02	
Gabon	00 - 01 - 02			
Gambia	00 - 01 - 02			
Ghana	00 - 01 - 02			
Guinea	00 - 01		02	
Guinea-Bissau			00 - 01 - 02	
Liberia	00 - 01		02	
Mauritania	00 - 01 - 02			
Morocco	00 - 01 - 02			
Nigeria	00 - 01 - 02			
Portugal	00 - 01 - 02			
Sao Tome and Principe			00 - 01 - 02	
Senegal	00 - 01 - 02			
Sierra Leone	00 - 01 - 02			
Spain	00 - 01 - 02			
Togo	00 - 01 - 02			
No. returns from coastal states	*17 - 17 - 13*	*3 - 2 - 3*	*2 - 3 - 6*	
DWFNs				
Belize				00 - 01 - 02
China	00 - 01 - 02			00 - 01 - 02
Cyprus				00 - 01
Estonia				00 - 01 - 02
France	00 - 01			00 - 02
Germany	01 - 02			
Greece	00 - 01 - 02			
Honduras	01			00
Ireland	01 - 02			
Italy	00 - 01 - 02			
Japan	00 - 01			02
Korea, Dem. People's Rep				00
Korea, Republic of	00 - 01 - 02			01
Latvia	00 - 01 - 02			01 - 02
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya				00 - 01 - 02
Lithuania	00 - 01 - 02			00 - 01
Netherlands	00 - 01 - 02			
Netherlands Antilles				00 - 01 - 02
Norway	00			
Other nei				00 - 01 - 02
Panama				00 - 01 - 02
Philippines				00 - 01 - 02
Poland	01 - 02			
Russian Federation	00 - 01 - 02			
Saint Vincent/Grenadines				00 - 01 - 02
Seychelles				00
Taiwan Province of China	00 - 01 - 02			
Ukraine	00 - 01	02		02
United Kingdom		01		
No. returns from DWFNs	*13 - 16 - 12*	*0 - 1 -1*		*15 - 13 - 13*

Table 2. Quantities and percentages of capture statistics estimated by FAO ('F')

	1970 (t)	1980 (t)	1990 (t)	2000 (t)	2001 (t)	2002 (t)
Catches not estimated	2,353,731	3,212,223	3,876,596	3,524,667	3,805,310	3,124,019
Catches estimated by FAO ('F')	63,800	149,902	239,537	124,988	124,320	249,604
Total catches	2,417,531	3,362,125	4,116,133	3,649,655	3,929,630	3,373,623
Catches not estimated	97.4%	95.5%	94.2%	96.6%	96.8%	92.6%
Catches estimated by FAO ('F')	2.6%	4.5%	5.8%	3.4%	3.2%	7.4%

Table 3. Level of identification of capture statistics in 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000-2002

Level of identification	1970	1980	1990	2000	2001	2002
Catches at species level	42.9%	50.4%	69.9%	58.1%	60.4%	64.6%
Catches at higher taxonomic levels	45.6%	38.0%	21.4%	34.0%	28.6%	28.0%
Catches as 'Marine fishes not identified'	11.6%	11.6%	8.7%	7.8%	11.0%	7.4%
Number of records (species item/country) with catches	466	765	1,050	1,115	1,073	1,080