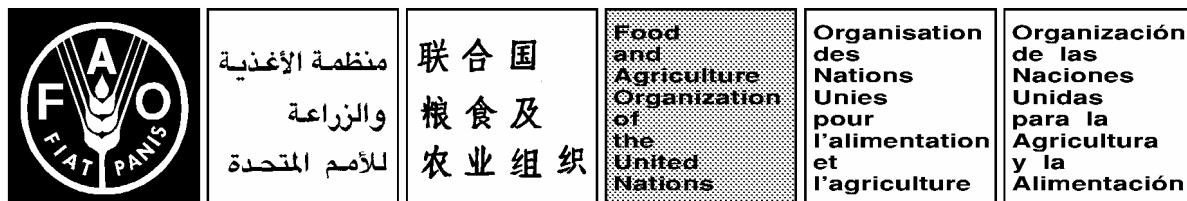


November 2008



FISHERY COMMITTEE FOR THE EASTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC

NINETEENTH SESSION

Cotonou, Benin, 4-6 November 2008

GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES

SUMMARY REPORT

A Global Conference on securing the sustainable development of small-scale fisheries took place on 13-17 October 2008 in Sofitel Centara Hotel Bangkok. It brought together some 280 participants from 65 countries around the world, half of whom were from civil society organizations.

The conference was opened by Dr. Jaranthada Karnasuta, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives of Thailand, in the presence of Mr He Changchui, Assistant Director-General, FAO Regional Office for Asia and Pacific and Dr Somying Piumsombun, Director-General, Department of Fisheries of Thailand. The Conference was jointly organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Thai Department of Fisheries in collaboration with the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre (SEAFDEC) and WorldFish Centre.

Over four days, the conference addressed three thematic areas that seek to bring together responsible fisheries and social development. These were:

- to secure resource use and access rights for small-scale fishing communities;
- to secure their post-harvest benefits from fish marketing and processing which support millions of primarily women;
- to strengthen the social, economic and human rights of small-scale fishing communities.

A panel on regional initiatives was set up under Theme 1 – Securing Sustainable Resource Use and Access Rights. The panel provided an overview of regional initiatives from several regions of the world, including Africa, represented on the panel by the CECAF Secretary. Activities undertaken at regional level as well as some of the policy and development trends were highlighted by the presenters. The CECAF Secretary presented the role and functions of the Artisanal Fisheries Working Group of the CECAF Scientific Sub-Committee in the region. From the presentations, there seems to be a consensus developing between the various regional organizations, government agencies and civil society organizations regarding the main challenges facing small-scale fisheries. There is also surprisingly strong coherence in the recommendations by various stakeholders in what needs to be done to address these issues, suggesting a strong basis for the building of consensus. Whilst tackling small-scale fisheries may not be a regional programmatic approach, relying far more heavily on national and local initiatives; there is clear scope for consensus on regional policy measures and recommendations on key ways to improve small-scale fisheries.

Participants were reminded that small-scale fisheries significantly contribute to food security and poverty alleviation and this contribution is under threat for various reasons, including over-fishing, negative impacts by other sectors and social, economic and political marginalization of small-scale fishers. Concerted efforts are needed to secure the land, sea and fishing rights of fishing communities and to strengthen their preparedness and capacity to withstand natural disasters to which they are especially exposed when living along the coast in often precarious conditions.

In a preparatory workshop to the conference, more than 100 civil society organizations representing small-scale fisheries communities and indigenous communities dependent on fisheries for their livelihood met. In their statement to the Conference they declared that “the human rights of fishing communities are indivisible and that the development of responsible and sustainable small-scale and indigenous fisheries is possible only if their political, civil, social, economic and cultural rights are addressed in an integrated manner.”

The conference highlighted that women who have a long-term vision and take a particular interest in the environment and its safeguarding are often excluded from decision-making processes and lack resource access rights. It was also emphasized that artisanal fishermen and women, indigenous people and traditional fishing communities are people with their own territory, culture and economic activities. Therefore, artisanal fishing is a socio-cultural expression and not merely a form of employment.

On the issue of rights, it was stressed that a human rights approach to fisheries recognized that everyone, including disadvantaged groups such as minorities and indigenous peoples, had legally mandated and recognized rights, and the basis to claim them was not charity but a right as such. In addition, violations of fisherfolks’ broader human rights undermined their incentive and capacity to claim and defend their fishing rights. For this reason, the establishment of new rights or the rejuvenation of traditional fishing rights cannot be done in isolation and must be done in conjunction with addressing basic human rights.

In conclusion, it was agreed that the challenges in small-scale fisheries should be taken head on. There is also a need for all the different stakeholders – fisherfolks, academics, governments, donors, regional and international agencies - to work together to implement the recommendations and ideas that had been generated during the Conference. Several experts representing different stakeholders put forward a series of recommendations on how to move the agenda forward, including a request from the host, the Department of Fisheries of Thailand, for a “Global Dedicated Programme on Small-scale Fisheries be developed.

FAO will submit the outcome of the Conference to the 28th session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries which will meet in early March 2009 in FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy.