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FISHERY COMMITTEE FOR THE EASTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC

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GLOBAL EMERGING ISSUES IN FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT RELEVANT TO THE REGION

SUMMARY

The strengthening of **fisheries governance** in regional fishery bodies and arrangements such as in the Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF) is rapidly emerging as a necessity for the sustainability of global fisheries resources. Excess fishing capacity that was created by widespread overinvestment and the consequent over-fishing in open access to small-scale fisheries has made **management of fishing capacity** at national and international levels necessary. Excess global fishing capacity is also a contributing factor to the increasingly serious and universal phenomenon of **illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing** that tends to undermine national and regional efforts to conserve and manage fish stocks. **Subsidies in fisheries** can also be a contributing factor to overinvestment in fisheries as well as a cause for distortion in international fish trade. There is strong interest among member countries to better understand whether and how subsidies affect fisheries sustainability and fish trade. Furthermore, the high **vulnerability of fisheries communities to climate change** doesn't facilitate fisheries development and improvement of people's livelihoods. The countries of the region should integrate sustainable responses to these various types of vulnerability into their national policies. The implementation of the **Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries** offers prospects in this sense. There is also increasing international interest in the potential role that **eco-labelling** may play in creating closer linkages between trade and sustainability objectives. Recently, **the global soaring prices of food and fuel** contributed to the increasing poverty in fisheries communities of the region. Lastly, there is growing recognition for **objective and reliable fishery status and trends reporting** which could be enhanced by the development of an International Plan of Action on Status and Trends Reporting on Fisheries as a means of enhancing advice of the most up-

to-date and accurate view of the prospects of maintaining or enhancing fish production. These were among issues considered at the Twenty-seventh Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) held in March 2007. They also constitute major components of the Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa recently formulated by the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department.

The Committee is invited to discuss these issues as they affect the CECAF region taking due account of the global interactions of the fisheries sector.

INTRODUCTION

1. In complying with the mandate given by the FAO Governing Bodies (COFI, Council and Conference), the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department is promoting and coordinating the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. The mandate also extends to addressing several related issues of international significance that have emerged in world fisheries and aquaculture concerning such implementation. The issues include fisheries governance, management of fishing capacity, illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, subsidies in fisheries, implementation of Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) in relation to management and climate change, eco-labelling of fishery products, global oil crisis with consequent soaring prices of food and fuel, and objective and reliable fishery status and trends reporting. These issues are interrelated to some degree and some of them were considered by the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) at its Twenty-seventh Session in March 2007. They also constitute major components of the Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa recently formulated by the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department.

I. REGIONAL FISHERIES GOVERNANCE

2. The need for regional cooperation among States for the conservation and management of fish stocks has been formally recognized at least since 1902, when cooperative scientific research commenced with the establishment of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). However, since that first initial step, and particularly since the Second World War, both national and international efforts to deal with stock management have intensified, as fish production has increased dramatically due largely to advances in fish harvesting technology. Nonetheless, these management efforts have very often not yielded optimal results, and global reviews by FAO of the current state of fish stocks indicate that in most cases present systems of fisheries governance[1] have failed to ensure resource conservation, economic efficiency and optimal human benefits.

3. In recent years, an increased international focus on governance in regional fishery bodies (RFBs) or arrangements has emerged consequent to the emphasis placed on sustainable uses of natural resources, transparency and accountability of institutions for their actions by the international community. The need for addressing and improving fisheries governance has also contributed to a more general trend in the shift in the role of government[2]. Presently, when the role

1 Fisheries Governance is defined here as "a continuing process through which governments, institutions and stakeholders of the fishery sector - administrators, politicians, fishers, environmental and interested organizations-- elaborate, adopt and implement appropriate policies, plans and management strategies to ensure resources are utilized in a sustainable manner. It could be at global, regional, sub-regional, national or local levels. In the process conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative actions may be taken".

of government is changing and stakeholders are assuming greater participation in decision making the challenge for State is how to promote and facilitate fisheries governance that is effective in terms of conservation and economic performance, equitable for both current and future generations, and broadly accepted to all stakeholders. The latter includes those who have a direct and real interest in the fisheries sector and those that do not but which, nonetheless, consider that they have a right to participate in decisions concerning what they consider a heritage of humankind. It is this situation, highly summarized, that challenges States as national resource custodians, and stakeholders in arriving at arrangements designed to strengthen fisheries governance that will ensure the long-term sustainable exploitation of stocks.

4. Central to the process of governance under a decentralized management approach is the notion that stakeholders with a real interest in a fishery should have the opportunity to participate transparently in the formulation and implementation of fisheries management decisions. Furthermore, this approach to governance implies, *inter alia*, that stakeholders should:

- Act responsibly as co-managers in the fishery, being accountable for their actions and or inaction with respect to management;
- Ensure that fisheries are exploited in a long-term sustainable manner and that decisions concerning exploitation are flexible and adaptable, capable of taking account of circumstances that can change rapidly;
- Take a holistic view of fisheries management and allocate fishing opportunities that will promote orderly, rational and efficient behaviour and outcomes;
- Apply the precautionary approach in decision-making in situations where information is incomplete or lacking; and
- Ensure that the real costs associated with fishing and fisheries are allocated and that these costs are ultimately reflected in the price of fish.

5. Where regional fishery bodies exist, States have in principle delegated some of their responsibilities to such bodies. Regional fisheries governance therefore focuses on international cooperative management of shared resources, including those stocks occurring on the high seas. The foundation and framework for regional governance is specified in global instruments, such as the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas (compliance Agreement), etc. At the same time it must be recognized that sound regional governance depends on effective input from members of regional bodies. This issue concerns the political willingness of States to participate openly and cooperatively for the good governance of stocks subject to management; and the national capacity to meet commitments and obligations technically and financially.

6. While most RFBs or arrangements that have fisheries management mandates have failed to deter overfishing (in some cases to prevent the collapse of stocks within their areas of competence), and to deter serious international disputes, some bodies have nonetheless, made important contributions to fisheries governance by:

2 Contributing to these shifts are the following: (i) the recognition that the role of civil society and the market is changing; (ii) greater accountability is being demanded by civil society concerning public actions generally, and particularly with respect to natural resource utilization; (iii) government is not the only crucial actor in addressing complex societal issues; (iv) centralized command and control interventions of governments are not always effective; (v) government action can be made more effective in a multi-actor network environment in which different steering mechanisms (government, civil society, market) interact for better negotiation and communication, striking a better balance than is currently the case; and (vi) actors at both the international and national levels interact.

- Promoting the development of national research and management capacity;
- Improving and strengthening data collection, handling and dissemination;
- Adopting management measures and resolutions relating to such issues as effort reduction, gear type, minimum sizes, mesh sizes, etc.;
- Adopting rules and procedures for boarding, inspection and enforcement; and
- Taking measures to enable implementation of recent international legal instruments.

7. However, in some regional fishery bodies, governance has continued to languish for a variety of reasons, including:

- A failure by some States to accept and implement international instruments central to enhanced fisheries governance;
- A lack of willingness by some States to delegate sufficient decision-making powers and responsibility to the regional bodies;
- Members of organizations and arrangements not providing complete and accurate data and information concerning their fishing operations, as required, in a timely manner, and in some cases, not reporting catches at all;
- Outputs of some RFBs not being operational because of the absence of an appropriate link between the scientific and technical experts on the one hand, and the decision/policies-makers and those responsible for implementing decisions/ policies, on the other hand;
- The lack of enforcement of management measures both at the national and regional levels, including: the absence or lack of MCS mechanisms to enforce management decisions;
- Problems arising from many of the regulated stocks being harvested in mixed fisheries where the overall fishing capacity is neither limited or controlled;
- Fishing activities of non-members in the waters covered by a regional body or arrangement;
- Inadequate human and financial resources to enable the bodies or arrangements to carry out their mandates satisfactorily; and
- The low frequency of meetings of bodies or arrangements which implies action may not be taken as urgently as may be desired.

8. Regional fishery bodies have the potential to be vehicles for sound fisheries governance provided that they have, among other things, realistic mandates, the required political backing, and the financial and human capacity to function as they are intended. The relevance of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries for governance is recognized and the Code and its guidelines are technically credible to fisheries experts and readily understood by non-experts. It, therefore, constitutes an important reference for improved fisheries governance.

9. At its Twenty-seventh session, COFI emphasized the importance of conducting performance reviews of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) and Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs). The need to develop common criteria for the evaluation of core functions and obligations was stressed, while recognizing that flexibility was needed for each RFMO or RFB to independently decide on the methodology, criteria and frequency of reviews. Review processes should be transparent and a mixed panel of experts consisting of both external and internal participants was recommended[3].

3 Report of the Twenty-seventh session of the Committee of Fisheries, para. 86.

10. Following the request of COFI, FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department will continue supporting RFMOs and RFBs and pursue its work on issues of concern to them such as overcapacity, improvement of fleet statistics and the issues of countries that undermine the effectiveness of RFMOs and vessels under "flags of non compliance"[4].

11. Furthermore it was recommended to pay due attention to the rights and needs of developing countries, including small island developing States (SIDS), in particular, to facilitate their full participation in the work of RFMOs and RFBs[5].

12. At its Eighteenth Session, CECAF discussed its role in a region with three fisheries management bodies. The participants at the Session emphasized the need for closer collaboration between CECAF and the various fisheries bodies in order to facilitate the efficient utilization of the human and financial resources to conserve and manage the fisheries resources in the region. The importance of the role of CECAF and the other sub-regional fisheries organizations that constitute necessary management tools to the services of the member states in their respective zones was recognized. The progressive transformation of CECAF into a commission, raised at meetings in Nigeria in 2001 and in Tenerife in 2002, is one of various options that can make CECAF's future actions more efficient[6].

II. MANAGEMENT OF FISHING CAPACITY

13. Several of the world's most important fisheries, including those of the CECAF region are subject to excess fishing capacity. Excess capacity means that, in many of the world's fisheries, fleets are not only larger than they need to be to catch and land (at the lowest cost) the volumes of fish currently available, but they would also exceed the requirements for fishing in the event of stocks being permitted to recover in size. Not only does this threaten the sustainability of the fish being exploited but it also constitutes a potential threat to other stocks. This situation has resulted from investors purchasing additional vessels to generate more returns – even when the fleet size is optimal from a general socio-economic point of view.

14. Excess fishing capacity is thus caused by inadequate control over fishers' access to fish stocks. Additionally, in some countries it is also brought about by public funding of investments in new vessels and/or the rehabilitation of old ones. There are indications that this phenomenon is on the decline in the region. Over-capacity is generally caused by excessive investments and an indiscriminate use of fishing inputs. Two manifestations of excess capacity are poor economic performance or inefficiency, and biological over-fishing. Overcapitalization in capture fisheries wastes investment capital and therefore leads to high fishing costs. Similarly, overexploitation of stocks wastes fish resources for future generations.

15. A fundamental problem for many countries in combating overcapacity is the lack of reliable data on the numbers and characteristics of craft and gear. Also important is the extent to which the vessels may be moved between fisheries, as action taken to reduce capacity in one fishery may be the direct cause of overcapacity in another, owing to the rapid relocation of the excess capacity. From a broader view, efforts made by some developed countries to reduce fishing capacity have led to the relocation of vessels in the fisheries of other countries, even in the

4 Report of the Twenty-seventh session of the Committee of Fisheries, para. 86.
5 Report of the Twenty-seventh session of the Committee of Fisheries, para. 88.
6 Report of the Eighteenth session of the CECAF, para. 52 and 53.

CECAF region. On a global scale, this does not constitute a reduction in capacity. These relocations, unless very well studied and monitored, could be detrimental to many of the importing countries. For instance, the vessels are usually purchased at a low price, and hence can be operated profitably (at least temporarily) even when fish stocks are depleted – a situation that is conducive to the further depletion of stocks. There have also been several cases of local conflicts arising over the fact that such imported vessels – which are usually of an industrial type - operate in direct competition with artisanal fleets.

16. At its Twenty-seventh Session, COFI reaffirmed linkages between overcapacity, allocations, overfishing and IUU fishing. The need for both national and regional action was highlighted. For instance the States should match their fishing capacity to sustainable harvesting levels. Furthermore, the Committee agreed upon the need to ensure that the urgent actions required in the IPOA-capacity, approved since 1997 by the FAO Council, were undertaken expeditiously and that its implementation was facilitated without delay. It was recalled that in addressing the problem of overcapacity, the right of developing States to develop their own fisheries, as well as to participate in high seas fisheries, should be taken into account[7].

17. The Committee is invited to take note of these developments. Delegates are invited to inform the Committee of actions taken or initiated to implement the IPOA on the Management of Fishing Capacity in their respective countries.

III. ILLEGAL, UNREGULATED AND UNREPORTED FISHING

18. Illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing is not a new phenomenon. It has been a source of concern for resource custodians since the earliest times when fishing communities first started to implement measures to conserve fish stocks. To a greater or lesser extent, IUU fishing is found in all capture fisheries (small-scale and industrial), irrespective of their location (marine and inland, in zones of national jurisdiction and on the high seas), species targeted, fishing gear employed or intensity of exploitation.

19. In any form IUU fishing serves to undermine national and regional efforts to conserve and manage fish stocks. In cases where stocks are seriously depleted, IUU fishing will inhibit, if not prevent, the re-building of those stocks. Illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing also leads to increased uncertainty in making responsible fisheries management decisions and in assessing the status of fish stocks.

20. There is a high degree of agreement that the following are some of the major issues that need to be addressed in order to combat IUU fishing:

- States should take action nationally and in relation to their fisheries and related legislation.
- International fisheries instruments should be brought into force as a matter of priority, and States should focus more intensely on implementing the Code of Conduct and the recently concluded IPOAs, and in particular the IPOA on the management of fishing capacity.
- Flag States should enhance control over the operations of their fishing vessels as the crux of the problem lies in the lack of control over fishing vessels.
- Port States measures should be invoked.

7 Report of the Twenty-second Session of the Committee on Fisheries, para.16.

- Regional fisheries management organizations should be strengthened.
- Fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) should be enhanced.

21. Due to its incidence and extent, IUU fishing remains a grave threat to sustainability and that it should be addressed comprehensively. National initiatives and measures are developed to combat IUU fishing, including the development and implementation of NPOAs-IUU. Some countries also referred to their monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) programmes and the adoption of mandatory vessel monitoring systems (VMS) that were considered basic tools in curbing IUU fishing. The importance of product traceability was highlighted in some cases as a means of blocking IUU-caught fish from entering national and international markets[8].

22. The countries that attended the Twenty-seventh session of COFI agreed to developing a new legally binding instrument to combat illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing. The agreement will cover document and cargo checks, training of inspectors and improvements of international information sharing. The draft agreement will be presented to the next COFI session in 2009 for approval[9].

23. Bearing in mind that information is needed to make the right decisions in planning, development and management of marine capture fisheries and aquaculture, that the required information and data should as much as possible be accurate and provided on a timely basis, the Committee is invited to discuss the incidence of IUU fishing in the region and suggests how this phenomenon could be addressed at sub-regional, bilateral and national levels.

IV. SUBSIDIES IN FISHERIES

24. Subsidies in fisheries could be one of the contributing factors to overinvestment in fisheries as well as a cause for distortion in international trade. There is a need to better understand whether and how subsidies affect fisheries sustainability and fish trade.

25. At its Twenty-seventh session, COFI noted the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations on fisheries subsidies and recommended that FAO provide technical expertise and cooperation to the ongoing negotiations and be prepared, as necessary, to assist in the implementation of future fisheries subsidies disciplines. FAO is also invited to continue its proactive engagement with WTO to allow for a better understanding of the fisheries subsidy issues and their potential impact on resource sustainability. FAO is also encouraged to continue its studies on the impact of subsidies on fishing capacity, IUU fishing, fisheries management and sustainable development in a manner that complemented, but not duplicated, WTO's work.[10].

26. The Committee is requested to take note of these developments.

V. IMPLEMENTING THE ECOSYSTEM APPROACH TO FISHERIES (EAF) INCLUDING MANAGEMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

27. At the Twenty-seventh session of COFI, EAF was recognized as the appropriate and necessary framework for fisheries management. Important progress has since been made by

8 Report of the Twenty-seventh session of the COFI, para. 17
9 FAO at work 2006-2007. Adapting to change on our hungry planet, p. 20.
10 Report of the Twenty-seventh session of the COFI, para. 18 and 40.

countries in the implementation of EAF. Therefore, certain States considered that the EAF should be based on existing effective management regime and measures, incrementally incorporating ecosystem consideration as knowledge and capacity grow, without prejudice to the application of the precautionary approach. The important efforts developed by FAO to raise awareness of the need for EAF among Members and RFBs and to facilitate implementation were commended.

28. The need to address important treats related to climate change is very high. It's clear that climate change will have a strong impact on fisheries as noted at the FAO Experts Consultation held at the FAO HQ in Rome in April 2008[11].

29. The oceans are an integral component of the climate system and respond to changes in the system. Natural fluctuations occur in oceanographic conditions -- some are annual while others are less frequent, with cycles that may extend over decades rather than years. Still others are longer-term changes, which might occur over thousands of years. Of current concern are the specific impacts of human activity on climate change, which is expected to result in increases in sea surface temperature, global sea level rise, decreases in sea-ice cover and changes in salinity, wave conditions, and ocean circulation. These changes in turn will have an impact on the biological productivity of marine ecosystems.

30. The impact on fisheries of changes in the biological productivity of marine ecosystems will vary between fisheries and will depend on the specific environmental changes that occur and the particular biological characteristics of each species. Changes in a particular marine environment may become conducive to the rapid growth of a high-priced species found in that environment, while the reverse may be true in other instances. Climate change will also result in modifications in the distribution of marine resources in an area. Most likely they will move towards the North or South Pole, whichever is closest. Consequences of these variations could be significant for the fishing industry.

31. An expected characteristic of global climate change is a likely increase in the variability of environmental conditions. Experience already gained in dealing with longer term fluctuations in marine environments, such as those induced by El Niño events, emphasize the need for adaptability. As well, ensuring sustainable economic levels of fishing capacity should be determined with the variability in mind. The effects of climate change on fisheries will impact a sector that is already characterized by full utilization of resources, large overcapacity and conflicts among fishers, and others vying for alternative uses of marine ecosystems. Thus, climate change adds a further argument for developing effective and flexible fisheries management system in an ecosystem context[12].

32. The following recommendations were made for the attention of FAO at the Twenty-seventh session of COFI:

(a) Complete and distribute the technical guidelines on social, institutional and economic considerations in EAF as quickly as possible.

(b) Cooperate with the Council in planning and implementing a conference about EAF,

11 See: http://www.fao.org/newsroom/fr/news/2008/1000876/index.html

12 Climate Change for Fisheries and Aquaculture. Technical Background Document from the Expert Consultation held on 7 to 9 April 2008. FAO, 18p. ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/013/ai787e.pdf

with an emphasis on socio-economic and institutional conditions and implications.

(c) Provide greater support for capacity building, through awareness building and direct technical assistance at the national level, drawing attention to the increased institutional capacity required for implementation of EAF. Regional meetings should be organized to allow for exchange of information and expertise.

(d) Give attention to the implementation of EAF in coral reef ecosystems as a priority area and to predator-prey relationships.

(e) Undertake a scoping study to identify the key issues on climate change and fisheries

(f) Initiate a discussion on how the fishing industry can adapt to climate change.

(g) Take a lead in informing fishers and policy makers about the likely consequences of climate change for fisheries[13].

33. A Workshop on Climate Change and Fisheries and Aquaculture was held at FAO HQ, Rome in April 2008. Options identified for decision - makers were policy, legal and implementation frameworks at national, regional and international levels. Addressing the potential complexities of climate change interactions and their possible scale of impact requires mainstreaming of cross-sectoral responses into governance frameworks. Responses are likely to be more timely, relevant and effective if they are brought into the normal processes of development and engage people and agencies at all levels. This requires not only the recognition of climate-related vectors and processes, and their interaction with others, but also availability of sufficient information for effective decision-making and approaches that engage public and private sectors. All of these elements will be vital in providing the best possible conditions in which the aims of food security – quantity and timing of food supply, access and utilization – can be met[14].

34. The Committee is requested to discuss these developments, particularly the state of the implementation of the recommendations within the region to address the issue of climate change.

VI. ECO-LABELLING OF FISH AND FISHERY PRODUCTS

35. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of voluntary eco-labelling15 programmes for various products and sectors, many of which were initiated by Non-governmental Organizations (NGO) and private industry as well as governments. All eco-labelling schemes share the common assumption that purchasing behaviour of consumers is not just motivated by price and mandatory quality and health standards. Rather, product attributes taken into account by consumers can relate to environment and ecological objectives as well as economics and social objectives (e.g. fair trade, support to small farmers, discouragement of child labour).

36. The ultimate objective of eco-labelling of fish and fish products should be to achieve the goal of sustainable capture fisheries and aquaculture. This is in line with the objectives of the Code

13 Report of the Twenty-seventh session of the COFI, para. 73 to 76.

14 Workshop on Climate Change and Fisheries and Aquaculture, FAO Headquarters, Rome, 07-09 April 2008. Options for Decision Makers. http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/foodclimate/presentations/fish/OptionsEM7.pdf

15 "Eco-labels are seals of approval given to products that are deemed to have fewer impacts on the environment than functionally or competitively similar products. The rationale for basic labeling information at the point of sale is that it links fisheries products to their production process" (From Deere, Carolyn L. (1999) Eco-labeling and Sustainable Fisheries, IUCN: Washington, D.C. and FAO: Rome.

of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and other international instruments, which generally place emphasis on achieving sustainability objectives through public policy interventions.

37. Pertinent objectives of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries as stated in Article 2 that have a bearing on the issue of eco-labelling include the following:

(a) Establish principles, in accordance with the relevant rules of international law, for responsible fishing and fisheries activities, taking into account all their relevant biological, technical, economic, social, environmental and commercial aspects;
(b) Promote the trade of fish and fishery products in conformity with the relevant international rules and avoid the use of measures that constitute hidden barrier to such. In addition, in addressing responsible fish utilization, several sections of Article 11 of the Code "Post-Harvest Practices and Trade": 11.1.11, 11.1.12, 11.2.3, 11.2.4, 11.2.13, and 11.3.2, emphasize the importance of achieving sustainability objectives through market based measures and improving the identification of the origin of fish and fishery product traded.

38. The COFI recognized, at its Twenty-seventh session, the importance of traceability for fish trade and the need to develop simple and practical traceability schemes for small-scale fisheries. Such schemes should be compatible with WTO rules. FAO is invited to organize a technical consultation on traceability and to pursue its work relating to the minimum substantive criteria laid down in the guidelines for marine capture fisheries eco-labels16.

39. The Committee is invited to discuss the issue on the basis of possible opportunities and concerns about eco-labelling in the context of the CECAF region.

VII. GLOBAL OIL CRISIS: SOARING FOOD AND FUEL PRICES

40. The unprecedented hike in food and fuel prices, related to the global oil crisis has had severe economic, social and political consequences in poor countries, including those in the CECAF region. High prices of agricultural inputs have become a major obstacle to developing countries' efforts to increase agricultural (including fisheries) production. The fisheries communities are part of the most affected groups and the high prices combined with overexploitation of many fish stocks to significantly contribute to decreasing production and profitability of fishing units, and to the increasing poverty.

41. In anticipating the widespread impact and grave nature of soaring food prices in December 2007, FAO launched its Initiative on soaring food prices (ISFP) to help vulnerable countries put in place urgent measures to boost food supplies by ensuring the success of their agricultural campaigns and to provide policy support to improve access to food.

42. Projects have been approved for 54 countries to help small farmers and vulnerable households mitigate the negative effects of rising food and input prices. Such projects will provide farmers with agricultural inputs for an expected duration of one year. The Initiative is intended to encourage donors, financial institutions and national governments to support the provision of inputs on a much larger scale[17], particularly to expand interventions in fisheries communities that seem not to be involved.

16 Report of the Twenty-seventh session of the COFI, para. 34 and 36

43. In some countries, initiatives are being developed to mitigate the negative impacts of the global food crisis on populations, notably the small producers. The Committee is invited to discuss the various initiatives both at national and international level and advise on how to include the fisheries sector.

VIII. OBJECTIVE AND RELIABLE FISHERY STATUS AND TRENDS REPORTING

44. Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture require informed decisions and actions at all levels, from policy makers to individual fishers, as well as environmentalists that are increasingly concerned about fisheries, consumers and the public. Decision-making based on the best scientific evidence requires reliable, relevant and timely information. There are increasing demands for objective, unbiased, peer-reviewed and transparent information on the status and trends of fisheries and fishery resources as a basis for policy making and fisheries management. Driving forces behind such demands include increasing recognition that overfishing is pervasive and effective management often lacking, increasing adoption of the precautionary approach to fisheries management as embodied in the UN Fish Stocks Agreement and the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, as well as eco-labelling issues and concerns about rare or endangered species and the environment.

45. Status and trends reporting has become an issue because a large amount of misinformation is being propagated by special interest groups. A study by the University of Washington evaluated the validity of 14 statements commonly made about the state of marine fishery resources and found that 10 of these were unsupportable or questionable, whereas only four were supportable. Most of the supportable ones and few of the unsupportable ones were attributed to FAO. Irrespective of whether such inaccurate information is generated deliberately to promote a cause or inadvertently through ignorance, it can have a major impact on public opinion and policy making which may not be in the best interest of both sustainable use of fishery resources and conservation of aquatic ecosystems.

46. FAO is addressing this issue by proposing the improvement of fishery status and trends reporting using a multifaceted approach as outlined by the FAO Advisory Committee on Fisheries Research (ACFR). ACFR has proposed that this could be facilitated by an International Plan of Action (IPOA) on Fishery Status and Trends Reporting which States would adopt through COFI. As envisaged, the IPOA would be a voluntary instrument which would specify actions and procedures to be undertaken by States, both individually and through regional fishery organizations or arrangements, and by FAO to improve fishery status and trends reporting. The IPOA could be built around the following principles:

- **Sustainability and security**. States should demonstrate their commitment to sustainable development of fishery resources and fisheries by providing the best information possible on the status and trends of fisheries within their jurisdictions and fisheries in other areas in which they participate.

17 See http://www.fao.org/newsroom/en/news/2008/1000877/index.html

- **Best scientific evidence**. States should seek to collect, compile and disseminate the best scientific evidence available on the nature and conduct of fisheries, including environmental and socio-economic information, in conformity with UNCLOS.

- **Participation and cooperation**. States should adopt mechanisms for inclusion of all relevant participants in the preparation, analysis and presentation of fishery information, including fishers, government and non-governmental organizations. States should cooperate with other States in developing and maintaining such fishery information either directly, or through regional fisheries organizations or arrangements, as appropriate.

- **Objectivity and transparency**. States should individually, and through regional fishery organizations and FAO, prepare and disseminate fishery information in an objective manner, taking into account the best scientific evidence available (including uncertainty), the precautionary approach and national and international obligations related to it, and applying quality criteria and quality assurance protocols. The IPOA should be implemented in a transparent manner in conformity with Article 6.13 of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

47. A mechanism to collate and exchange fishery information including status and trends reports is under development and it could serve as the key vehicle for implementation of the IPOA. During its functioning from February 1999 to December 2005, the global information system for fisheries (FIGIS) implemented by FAO, facilitated exchange of fishery information on a wide variety of information domains such as fishery statistics, exploited species, fishery resources and stocks, the fisheries themselves, fishing methods, fishing fleets, fish processing and food safety, fish marketing and trade, species introductions, and fish diseases, to name but a few. In addition to dissemination, the information was exchanged according to arrangements specified in partnership agreements involving FAO, regional fishery organizations and national centres of excellence, and using agreed protocols. The improvement of global information flux on reliable fisheries status and trends was completed by the preparation of methodological and operational tools to support production of statistical data on fisheries at grass-root level.

48. FAO has a major responsibility to support capacity building in developing countries to allow users to access, utilize and contribute to fisheries information and knowledge systems. Important efforts were made and continue to be made to provide access to the Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts (ASFA) bibliographic database in low-income food-deficit countries and to provide more input to the database from those countries. Likewise, software for the collection and processing of fishery statistics has been implemented in many developing countries to improve the quality of national statistics and facilitate exchange at regional and global levels.

49. The Committee is invited to exchange national experiences concerning the issue of generation and dissemination of information and knowledge on the sector.

IX. SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE COMMITTEE

50. The Committee is invited to review these issues in the context of the CECAF region. In particular the Committee may wish (i) to identify mechanisms to improve fisheries governance at national and regional level, and reporting on the fisheries sector, (ii) to advance the implementation of the IPOA on the management of Fishing Capacity and to combat IUU fishing in the region, and (iii) to implement EAF. In addition it may wish to exchange experiences concerning the issue of subsidies and identify possible opportunities and concerns about Eco-labelling. (iv) to review the responses given to climate change and the impact of the soaring food and fuel prices on fishing units and fisheries communities. The Committee might wish to also formulate specific recommendations on any of the issues presented and discussed for consideration by the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) at its twenty-eighth session in March 2009.