The Rage of a Perfect Storm

Months after a container ship carrying toxic chemicals caught fire off the west coast of Sri Lanka, fisherfolk still suffer from the dreadful aftereffects of the country's worst marine ecological disaster

A 186-m-long container ship called X-Press Pearl, registered in Singapore, arrived in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on the night of 19 May 2021, carrying 1,486 containers. The next day, it was reported that the ship caught fire. At that time, it was located 9.5 nautical miles northwest of the Colombo port. Five days later, a large explosion occurred inside the vessel; by late afternoon, containers were dropping off the vessel into the sea. On 2 June, the ship finally sank.

The incident was deemed the worst marine ecological disaster in Sri Lankan history. The ship's cargo included, among others, 12,085 metric tonnes (MT) of plastics and polymers, 8,252 MT of chemicals and 3,081 MT of metals. After the ship caught fire, its debris, burnt goods and plastic pellets washed ashore in large quantities. Dead fish, turtles, whales and dolphins were found along the western coast. Fish appeared with plastic pellets trapped in their gills. Initially noticed along the coast of Negombo, ship debris, and dead fish and turtles, washed up in other locations hundreds of kilometres to the north and south, indicating the widespread nature of the damage.

Blindsided

A day after the ship caught fire, the Department of Fisheries banned fishing in the coastal strip between Kalutara district and Negombo district. The disaster affected 12,731 fishers engaged on 4,612 coastal craft—both skippers and crew. Apart from those directly involved in fishing, this event also afflicted large numbers of stakeholders in the fisheries value chain, including those in ancillary services. Overall, 63,563 people have been affected by the accident, based on calculations by civil society organizations.

The enforcement on 21 May of the fishing ban resulted, overnight, in a series of shocks to the fishing community. Families lost their main source of income; the supplementary income from women workers was also curtailed; and demand for fish consumption dropped suddenly in response to fears of contamination. Since the ban put the entire local economy into a collective shock, traditional sources of insurance disappeared at once, leaving fishing families with no community assistance. Fishers lost assets like fishing gear. The combined effect was a dramatic loss of well-being.

The devil in the details

The fishing community's immediate response was to tighten the belt, reducing consumption. Such measures put additional pressure on women, traditionally accustomed to shoulder the burden of household-consumption shortfalls. Nevertheless, food insecurity leads to nutritional insecurity, which has a tumble-down effect on children's nutrition. It is difficult to imagine how the affected households managed to pay regular bills—house rent, electricity, water and goods taken on instalment, among other things—that amount to a monthly average of about Sri Lankan Rupees (SLR) 20,000 (US$ 100).

Parental care has suffered, too. In Sri Lankan society, parents usually live with their children in their old age. Expenses related to such care-giving can be excessively high. In a time of distress, entire families get cut off from leisure

*This article is by **Oscar Amarasinghe** (oamarasinghe@yahoo.com), chancellor of the Ocean University of Sri Lanka, and president of the Sri Lanka Forum for Small Scale Fisheries (SLFSSF)*

HEMANTHA WITHANAGE

The ship's cargo included over 20,000 metric tonnes of plastics and polymers, chemicals and metals. The debris, dead fish and wildlife washed up along hundreds of kilometres of the west coast of Sri Lanka

activities, films, pleasure trips, and social and religious obligations. This snowballs into increased psychological stress on all members of the family. All of this cannot be quantified in value terms.

In the absence of insurance markets for fishing-related risks, people resort to credit. In fishing societies, exchange of small loans is very common. However, the ship disaster hit everyone equally; the fishing community lost its insurance function. In such conditions, people tend to mortgage jewellery, liquidate assets or borrow from moneylenders who charge exorbitant rates of interest, as high as 180 per cent per year.

Since the ban put the entire local economy into a collective shock, traditional sources of insurance disappeared at once, leaving fishing families with no community assistance

Since the day the fishing ban was imposed, the debt of fishing households began accumulating. Defaults on instalments for repayment added to the pressure on households, exacerbating suffering and misery.

COVID-19 and bluewashing

A ship disaster of this scale is a calamity at any time for vulnerable fishing communities. The timing of this particular one in Sri Lanka, however, could not have been worse. The fishing community on the western coast had already been reeling under the broad-spectrum destruction of COVID-19. The pandemic's first wave jolted all the links in the fish value chain, dismantling almost all of them. Curfews to prevent new infections, lowered demand for fish, falling prices and disruption in the markets had all hit fishing activities seriously. Operations got downsized by 45-65 per cent.

The second wave of the pandemic hit the country in October 2020. A

garment factory and the fish market of the western town of Peliyagoda became the eye of the storm, reporting a large number of COVID-19 cases. Rumours began to circulate that fish was a carrier of the new coronavirus; consumers stopped eating fish. Just as the affected population began to recover, the third wave of COVID-19 arrived in late-April 2021. While the weakening economy and stagnant incomes hit everybody, the poorer groups were struck particularly badly. Fishing restrictions and poor demand for fish meant poor income for fishers, leaving their livelihoods hanging by a thread. Particularly hit were the small-scale fishers catering to local markets.

It was in this situation that the Xpress Pearl ship disaster occurred. The new-fangled attempt to marry economic growth with a narrow environmental agenda in the 'Blue Economy' paradigm excludes artisanal and small-scale fishers from development decisions that affect them and their future directly.

The absence of any public consultation in the implementation of development projects, coastal land grabs by tourism and other interests, and the marginalization of fishing communities—these are among the complaints most often heard from around the country. Many fishers have lost their beach-seining, craft anchorage and fish-drying sites. These new injustices emerge from the unregulated and undemocratic growth of the Blue Economy.

Fishing households face untold suffering. Food and nutritional insecurity are on the rise; lowered consumption and expenditure on fish are causing misery, families are struggling to care for their old and their young, and debts are accumulating. The fishing ban will continue until the debris is cleared from the seabed by the responsible party. The agony and misery will continue to grow. Besides giving compensation for lost wages, those held accountable for the disaster must be made to pay a premium to cover the numerous economic and social costs suffered by the affected communities.

CHAMILA KARUNARATHNE / EPA-EFE

Fish killed by plastic pellets from the X-Press Pearl. The timing of the disaster could not have been worse for fishing communities affected by successive waves of the COVID-19 pandemic

Importantly, development strategies should be designed to improve the resilience of fishers to external shocks. This requires, among other things, the strengthening of community sources of insurance through, for example, co-operatives; promoting self-insurance strategies like savings, alternative livelihoods and more employment for women; and addressing the social injustices caused by the Blue Economy agenda.

For more

A Beacon of Trust
https://www.icsf.net/samudra/sri-lanka-covid-19-a-beacon-of-trust/

Oil, acid, plastic
https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/oil-acid-plastic-inside-shipping-disaster-gripping-sri-lanka

X-Press Pearl sinking shines a light on seafood safety
https://www.icsf.net/newss/sri-lanka-x-press-pearl-sinking-shines-a-light-on-seafood-safety/

A Beacon of Trust

As the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the fisher economy of Sri Lanka, leaving households indebted and distressed, co-operatives emerged as a beacon for the small-scale fishing sector's well-being

Close to 350,000 kg of fish is brought everyday to the Peliyagoda Central Fish market, on the outskirts of Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka Three thousand sellers sit, jostle and haggle in close proximity at the central hub for retailers to collect and disperse their produce to various parts of the country. This hub of market activity was hit with the worst crisis in its history when 19 cases of COVID-19 were discovered in its premises in October last year. The authorities shut down the market at once.

However, even before the industry had barely recovered from its first hit, Sri Lanka's second wave of the pandemic began. The second wave started with the emergence of a COVID cluster at a garment factory, followed by the Peliyagoda fish market cluster. The latter had the most calamitous impact on fisheries. Several major fishing harbours and a number of other fish markets and retail stalls in the country were subject to temporary closure.

Immediately, the rumours began to spread hard and fast: "The fish carried the coronavirus!" Fish consumption plummeted. Prices of fish stock followed suit and small-scale fishers were hit two-fold: negotiating between the risks to their health, and coping with desperation to sustain their livelihood.

In an attempt to control the damage of misinformation, Sri Lanka's health ministry almost immediately put out statements reaffirming that fish and related products were safe for consumption, provided that they were cooked in a hygienic manner. In what became a viral publicity stunt, Dilip Wedaarachchi, former fisheries minister, brought a raw fish to a press conference, to prove a point. "I am making an appeal to the people of this country to eat this fish. Don't be afraid. You will not get infected by the coronavirus," he said, before taking a bite out of the whole fish.

It wasn't just domestic consumption that suffered. In the first two months following the second wave, exports dropped from their 2019 levels by Sri Lankan Rupees (SLRs) 2,589 mn. Since the coronavirus landed in the island country, right up till the end of the first wave—that is, during March, April and May—the loss of foreign exchange was close to SLR7,279 mn.

To mitigate the losses due to lockdowns during the first wave of the pandemic, which caused a drop in fish production, the government was forced to import fish, mostly in the form of canned fish products. The second wave saw fish imports drop significantly, perhaps due to a realization that the only way to combat the virus was by adhering to health regulations. It was an opportunity for the industry to pick itself up, even as drastically shrinking incomes would take longer to get back to normal.

As food security dwindled, people resorted to their options included mortgage of jewellery, and borrowings from money lenders and co-operatives.

Knock-on effects

Close to 570,000 people find direct or indirect employment in Sri Lanka's fishing industry. The country's total fisheries-dependent population has been estimated at 2.7 mn. During the first wave of the pandemic, all links in the fish value chain were practically dismantled. Demand and supply suffered significantly in myriad ways. One of the early outcomes of the first round of curfews was the closure of retail outlets, because distribution came to a standstill. The flourishing e-commerce world showed little interest in fish, a perishable product;

*This article is by **Oscar Amarasinghe** (oamarasinghe@yahoo.com), Chancellor, Ocean University of Sri Lanka and President-Sri Lanka Forum for Small Scale Fisheries (SLFSSF), Sri Lanka*

OSCAR AMARASINGHE

Deserted landing site, Gandarawella, Sri Lanka. To mitigate the losses due to lockdowns, the government was forced to import fish, mostly in the form of canned fish products

online sales did not come to the rescue. Tourism is an integral part of the fish-consumption economy; its shuttering caused a roll-on impact, further diminishing the demand for fish.

About 1.9 mn Sri Lankans are self-employed daily wagers. Curfews destroyed their means of living. The effect was felt at landing sites where fishers complained of a lack of buyer interest due to restrictions on travel, and strict control on providing passes to merchants.

Low demand, in turn, meant fish prices dropped rapidly through the crises. Prices of products like crab dropped from SLR1,200 per kg to SLR500; those of seer fish went from SLR1,250 per kg to SLR400. Unsold catch could not be channelled to drying and preservation operations; the curfews led to the dry fish centres remaining closed. The Ceylon Fisheries Corporation (CFC), a government-owned marketing agency, had no capacity to deal with the unsold fish. The losses just kept piling up.

Fish production suffered, too, even though the authorities did not actually restrict fishing during the pandemic. Complex rules for obtaining passes, restrictions on beach seining, and fear of the virus hitting landing sites meant inland fishers largely kept away from their work. Fishers in the south of the country in places like Galle, Matara and Hambantota often migrated farther south, targeting lobster resources. The imposition of curfews and the need for social distancing meant fishers started avoiding migration and participating in beach-seine activities.

The human impact was direct: incomes dropped and people found it tough to make ends meet. In April, May and June of 2020, during the first wave of the pandemic, many small-scale fishing households accumulated sizeable debts. Most fishing households indicated they paid instalments on bank loans, house constructions loans, and loans taken from co-operatives, among others, in addition to monthly water and electricity bills.

On an average, our research identified 15 types of monthly loan repayments amounting to approximately SLR20,000; the amount includes interest payments and sometimes part of the principal. The official 'poverty line' in Sri Lanka was defined as a monthly income of SLR4,440 per month in 2018. During the first wave, incomes of poor fishers who do not own fishing craft were touching the official poverty line. It is

obvious that fishers were in no position to pay back their loans on time.

Accumulated debts

For the pandemic's first three months, each household accumulated an average debt of about SLR60,000. To address the situation, the government requested several institutions—lenders and the electricity and water utilities, for example—to provide borrowers a grace period of at least three months to pay back loan instalments and settle their bills. By the time the situation improved in June, households were under pressure to pay back accumulated debts, putting the fishing industry under heavy pressure. And just as things were getting back to normal, Peliyagoda happened, pushing down prices and incomes into a spiral.

Support from all quarters

Food security for low-income groups faced severe threats in the early days of the curfews and lockdowns. When compared to other self-employed and daily wage workers, however, the direct impact on fishers was limited, as they were able to go to sea and bring back some fish, at least sufficient for the household's daily curry. As food security dwindled, people resorted to a number of ways to meet their basic food needs; common options included mortgage of jewellery, and borrowings from money lenders and co-operatives. In turn, many accumulated severe debts, even as some of the earlier debts remained unsettled.

Political campaigning for the parliamentary elections provided relief to those in the hot zone, with candidates actively providing dry rations to boost their support base. In the months of April and May, the government made arrangements to import a large consignment of canned fish to be sold at a subsidized price of SLR100, nearly half the usual price for a can of fish. Legumes like red lentils, bought from India, were also imported in large quantities. Along with canned fish, they formed the two most preferred food items in the country, especially among low-income groups.

With markets and retail outlets remaining closed during the first wave, a new group of vegetable and fish sellers emerged. They sold their wares while commuting in vans and lorries, an appreciable feat, the only drawback being that their services remained limited to populous areas with motorable roads.

A presidential task force ensured island-wide distribution of fish, facilitating movement of vegetables and other essential foods, while also providing free food baskets to low-income families. District secretaries were allocated SLR 2 mn to buy and distribute fish, especially in remote areas. This method of marketing, however, did not work well with the fast-perishing fishing products; they need to be iced and sold in a short time to prevent decomposition.

Future proof

The aftermath of the pandemic—and the havoc it wreaked—revealed some valuable lessons for Sri Lanka. One was the industry's need and dependence on fishing co-operatives for survival. As the principal lenders in small-scale fishing communities, co-operatives refrained from charging interest on loans and principal payments from members/borrowers who were suffering from lowered (or no) income from fishing. Trust among co-operatives is at an all-time high. For policymakers and planners, this is a beacon.

Simple tweaks to an already existing community system will go a long way in protecting Sri Lanka's fishing industry from future shocks.

These co-operatives could, in the days ahead, play a major role in marketing, ensuring a fair price and income to fishers. However, to do so, they need assistance to build the necessary infrastructure and to break middlemen oligopsonies. One of the greatest shortcomings of Sri Lanka's fisheries co-operatives is their poor contribution towards resource management. For this to improve, the constitution of fisheries co-operatives requires the incorporation of resource-management concerns. Simple tweaks to an already existing community system will go a long way in protecting Sri Lanka's fishing industry from future shocks. It will also eradicate the need for comic stunts requiring the eating of raw fish at news conferences.

For more

Path to a Policy Upgrade
https://www.icsf.net/images/samudra/pdf/english/issue_84/4497_art_Sam_84_art16_Sri%20Lanka_Oscar%20Amarasinghe.pdf

Action Stations
https://www.icsf.net/images/samudra/pdf/english/issue_82/4407_art_Sam_82_art03_Sri%20Lanka_Oscar_Amarasinghe.pdf

Path to a Policy Upgrade

Incorporating the SSF Guidelines into the national fisheries policy requires several rounds of engagement with state and community stakeholders

The onset of the new millennium saw the process of fisheries development taking a new path globally. It's one with a strong emphasis on offshore and deep-sea fishing, fish exports and the increased use of oceans for tourism and other development activities, indicating a rising dependence on blue economic growth. These processes remain weakly regulated or unregulated; they marginalize the artisanal and small-scale fisheries (SSF) sector rooted in vulnerable communities severely hit by poverty and displacement.

The active participation of fisheries officials at the stakeholder consultation workshops was a key feature of the island-wide consultations.

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines), adopted in 2014 at the meeting of the Committee on Fisheries of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), came as a panacea for the protection of the rights of small-scale fishers. In an effort to implement the SSF Guidelines, the Sri Lanka Forum for Small-Scale Fisheries (SLFSSF) embarked on an island-wide consultation process in 2018-2019, leading to the formation of a small-scale fisheries policy that has incorporated a number of policy strategies to protect the rights of small-scale fishers. Now it is up to the government of Sri Lanka to adopt them, to see that the small-scale fisheries sector is protected and would continue to perform its age-old functions of providing employment, nutrition and food security to coastal populations.

The implementation process

Between July 2018 and August 2019, SLFSSF embarked on a process to implement the SSF Guidelines, with assistance from the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), as part of FAO efforts towards the global implementation of the SSF Guidelines. The plan of activities included sensitizing the state actors (from diverse institutions in the coastal zone) to the nuances of the guidelines; developing communication tools for community stakeholders; conducting stakeholder consultation workshops covering several parts of the country; assessing current policy; and re-modelling it by incorporating the relevant parts of the guidelines.

Community representatives

The participants at these workshops included fisher community representatives (including women fisherfolk), state actors representing diverse government departments operating in the coastal zone, and policy experts. The active participation of fisheries officials at the stakeholder consultation workshops was a key feature of the island-wide consultations. This resulted in a group of policy experts creating an SSF policy document (SSF Policy 2019), taking into account a number of thematic areas that formed the missing links in the fisheries policy as it existed in 2018. This was discussed and finalized at a policy workshop held in June 2019, attended by the Secretary of the Ministry of Fisheries, who made the keynote address. It was expected that the current national fisheries policy would be remodelled taking into account the new policy guidelines.

*This article is by **Oscar Amarasinghe** (oamarasinghe@yahoo.com), President of the Sri Lanka Forum for Small-Scale Fisheries (SLFSSF), Sri Lanka*

SLFSSF

The state actor sensitizing workshop held in Colombo 28th September 2018. The major outcome was the Ministry of Fisheries agreeing to initiate discussions in incorporating the SSF Policy 2019 into the national fisheries policy of 2018

Addressing existing voids

A number of missing links in the National Fisheries Policy of 2018 were noticed in thematic areas, such as tenure rights, sustainable resource management, post-harvest and trade, occupational health and safety, social protection and insurance, gender equality, disaster risk and climate change, social development, capacity development and empowering community organizations. The SSF Guidelines implementation process addressed all these missing links, and policy strategies were prepared based on the island-wide consultations carried out in 12 of the 15 coastal districts.

In the SSF Policy 2019, the emphasis laid on the need to look at the coastal ecosystem as a whole in management decision making was an important step forward. This was associated with the need for cross-sectoral collaboration and institutional coordination and the need to establish co-management platforms at the local level, rising up to the national level. Emphasis was laid on the incorporation of four important features into co-management platforms to make them integrated, inclusive, participatory and holistic. The need for capacity building of both state and community stakeholders for effective participation in such platforms was also underlined. A related proposition was the need to empower community organizations, consulting them at all stages of development activities and obtaining their active participation in management decisions. Several policy statements were also incorporated to protect the legitimate tenure rights of fishers to land, water and fish resources, as well as their rights to the demarcation of boundaries in the coastal zone.

The SSF Policy 2019 also laid down a number of strategies on social protection, work conditions and fisheries insurance. The need to revise and improve the fishermen's pension scheme, adopting the relevant ILO conventions on work in the fishing sector, reducing discrepancy in the wages paid for men and women, and establishing a fisheries insurance scheme jointly with fisheries cooperatives to minimize informational asymmetries, are important

improvements over the current policy. Gender is another area that got increased attention in the new policy; it was also proposed, among other things, that women's representation in the committees of community organizations should be a minimum of 25 per cent. Appreciably, the need for government intervention in marketing and trade, to cope with unfair producer prices, unfair trade and nutrition issues, was also highlighted.

Negotiations with the government

Political turmoil in late 2019, and the period through the first round of COVID-19 (from March until the parliamentary elections in July) saw a long period of 'governance failure', wherein the administrative system remained very weak and 'regressive'.

As a maiden effort in preparing socially optimal action plans, the new SSF Policy 2019 could accompany an action plan...

The fisheries sector was no exception and the only function of the Ministry of Fisheries was to ensure that fishing, fish landing and distribution continued uninterrupted.

Now that the country has established an effective governance system, the SLFSSF is initiating a process of negotiating with the government with the aim of incorporating the SSF Policy 2019 into the national fisheries policy of 2018. The SLFSSF is strongly supported in this by the National Science Foundation (NSF) of Sri Lanka, which has requested the Ministry of Fisheries to consider the SSF Policy 2019 for improving the national policy. The government's response has been positive and a change in the current national policy seems possible in the near future; it will go a long way in securing a sustainable small-scale fisheries sub-sector. Unfortunately, the second wave of COVID-19 devastated Sri Lanka, delaying the proposed discussions; they are expected to commence once the pandemic subsides.

Pre-conditions for 'take-off'

Successful implementation of the proposed SSF Guidelines depends on certain important pre-conditions. These will ensure the policy is properly translated into community deliverables. They are:

Awareness building: In general, the governors see fishing as 'catching fish to earn an income'. They have poor knowledge of fishing communities, the issues confronted by them in their day-to-day life, social-development needs, social security protection, levels of poverty and threats posed to them by other coastal resource users and climate change, among other things. No efforts or investments have gone into studying fishing communities since the last census of fisheries was carried out in 1972. Which is why a national seminar is in the works, aimed at 'understanding fisheries and fishing communities'; this could be an 'awareness-building' workshop, especially aimed at state officers and parties interested in, and working towards, securing sustainable SSF. This timely and apt move could be held in 2022, the year devoted to artisanal and small-scale fisheries.

Assist the government to prepare an action plan: Past experience shows that action plans are often prepared without being guided by policy. In fact, in the absence of any national policy, past actions plans were prepared in an ad hoc manner. This age-old practice cannot continue in the presence of a national policy. As a maiden effort in preparing socially optimal action plans, the new SSF Policy 2019 could accompany an action plan based on information obtained from extensive stakeholder consultations, including an array of activities proposed by the fishing communities and state actors, scrutinized and improved with the participation of experienced policy and planning experts, academics, researchers and civil society organizations.

Integrated and collaborative platforms: The coastal zone resources are also used by other stakeholders like those in tourism, industries, agriculture, wildlife, forests, and so on. Unfortunately, mandates of various institutions differ and there are huge mismatches among them. This often

leads to friction among parties who operate in the same arena. The new Coastal Zone and Coastal Resource Management Plan of 2018 intends to manage the coastal zone through a Special Area Management (SAM) process, a model that has produced fruitful results in certain areas in the past, for example, in Rekawa. SAM is a typical example of integrated, participatory and holistic management. Thus, it is necessary now to ensure that fisheries interests are well represented in SAM. This necessitates the establishment of Fisheries Management Areas, as laid down in Article 31 (1) of the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act of 1996, and Fisheries Committees, under Article 31 (2) of the same. The representatives of Fisheries Committees could participate in Integrated Coastal Resource Management (ICRM) platforms, such as SAM. This demands a strong commitment by the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

Sectoral integration and institutional coordination: The need for cross-sectoral collaboration and institutional coordination in managing the coastal zone resource use is also an important concern. Co-management efforts will not succeed unless discrepancies among the mandates of different institutions are minimized. Therefore, it is proposed that the state intervenes to minimize overlapping policies and mandates among institutions responsible for coastal resources development, conservation and management. Even the planned SAM process will not achieve the desired results if such institutional coordination does not take place and conflicts among mandates are not resolved. A related issue would be the promotion of demarcating the boundaries of ecosystems in the coastal zone, when boundaries of diverse subsystems—such as lagoons, mangroves, reserves and forests—are not clear and difficulties are encountered in managing coastal resources.

Training and capacity building: The effective implementation of a number of policy strategies needs building up the capacities of state officers as well as communities in a number of disciplines. While there is much interest today in the sustainable use of resources, conservation and management, the fishing communities are hardly made aware of the diverse measures to be adopted to achieve the goals of sustainability. A sizeable void exists in the area of fisheries management, especially in the idea of co-management. Neither the state officers nor the communities fully understand what co-management means and how it leads to integrated, inclusive, participatory and holistic resource management in the coastal zone. Thus, all stakeholders in the coastal zone should be trained to actively participate in co-management platforms.

Empowering cooperatives: When it comes to performing the functions expected of a strong community organization, the fisheries cooperatives suffer from two problems at present: one, their weak role in resource management and, two, the presence of a parallel community structure, the Rural Fisheries Organizations (RFOs).

A sizeable void exists in the area of fisheries management, especially in the idea of co-management.

Even though they have performed fairly well in meeting an array of the well-being aspirations of the fisherfolk, the cooperatives have failed tremendously in managing the fisheries resources, especially in controlling entry. On the other hand, the RFOs remained outside the mainstream of activities because they commanded no faith or trust among the people and did not enjoy a dominant status among fishers. This was the opposite case with the fisheries co-operatives that had won the faith of communities with, for example, transparency in financial matters, auditing of accounts, open membership for all (including women), provision of livelihood capital, equal treatment to all, organization of collective activities, high social cohesion and protecting the rights of fishing communities.

Therefore, fisheries cooperatives need to be empowered, to represent fisher interests at Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) platforms and also to take the leading role in ICZM as the representative of the dominant stakeholder group.

Social security protection: A serious drawback in the government involvement in social security and social welfare in Sri Lanka's fisheries sector has been its inability to offer an effective pension scheme to fishers, the only 'safety net' that aimed at providing protection to SSF. Apart from the structural inefficiencies, the basic problem was the non-viability of the scheme, which depended heavily on government funds. The Ministry of Fisheries has to revisit the scheme, identify the reasons for its failure and attempt to revitalize it with the required institutional co-ordination, in consultation with social security experts. Fisheries insurance has always remained ineffective due to the inherent—and colossal—informational issues. One of the effective means of minimizing information asymmetries is to link insurance schemes with fisheries co-operatives that posess near-perfect knowledge of what happens at sea. This necessitates a close dialogue among the Department of Fisheries, insurance companies and fisheries cooperatives.

Conclusion

The process of implementation of the SSF Guidelines in Sri Lanka has been quite successful in making significant progress on the policy front. The major output of the process was the preparation of a small-scale fisheries policy that has incorporated several guidelines missed out in the current policy, while the major outcome was the Ministry of Fisheries agreeing to initiate discussions in incorporating the SSF Policy 2019 into the national fisheries policy of 2018. The success of the process could be attributed to the active participation of the government actors throughout, the successful conduct of island-wide stakeholder consultations and the ability of the project staff to explain the SSF Guidelines to the diverse stakeholders in their own language in very simple terms.

The expected benefits of this exercise, however, depend not only on the successful incorporation of the relevant guidelines into the national policy but also on ensuring that the process will finally benefit the small-scale fishers. This requires several rounds of engagement in preparing the people and the environment. The essentials and the deliverables remain constant: training and awareness and capacity building of state and community stakeholders; sectoral integration and institutional coordination; empowerment of community organizations; and assistance from the government to prepare action plans, based on policy guidelines.

For more

FAO - ICSF's Project: National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and legislation integrates key elements of the SSF Guidelines
https://igssf.icsf.net/en/page/1088-Sri%20Lanka.html

Sri Lanka: Aiming for Holistic Management
https://www.icsf.net/en/samudra/article/EN/80-4368-Aiming-for-Holi.html

SSF Guidelines: Action Stations
https://www.icsf.net/en/samudra/article/EN/82-4407-Action-Stations.html

Co-operatives: Wellbeing Aspirations
https://www.icsf.net/en/samudra/article/EN/79-4352-Wellbeing-Aspir.html

The national fisheries and aquaculture policy: Changes proposed to the current fisheries policy, 'to incorporate relevant FAO Voluntary Guidelines for securing sustainable small scale fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication'
https://igssf.icsf.net/images/ICSF_FAO%20PROJECT1/SL%20010_Changes%20proposed%20to%20the%20National%20Fisheries%20Policy.pdf

Action Stations

Sri Lanka's National Fisheries Policy needs to be remodelled to incorporate the SSF Guidelines in order to attain the goal of securing sustainable small-scale fisheries

The Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development (MFARD) of Sri Lanka recently prepared a White Paper on National Fisheries Policy in 2018, which was approved by the Cabinet and is expected to be presented to the parliament. It fails to address a number of compelling needs of the small-scale fisheries sector. The Sri Lanka Forum for Small-Scale Fisheries (SLFSSF) responded to this need; it embarked on a process to implement the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines) between July 2018 and May 2019, with assistance from the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), as part of efforts of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) towards global implementation of the SSF Guidelines. Following the FAO Project Results Matrix, the SLFSSF took up a number of activities.

Plan of activities and methodology

The plan of activities included: sensitizing the state actors from diverse institutions in the coastal zone on the SSF Guidelines; development of communication tools for community stakeholders, as part of which the SSF Guidelines were translated and posters and factsheets prepared; stakeholder consultation workshops covering several parts of the country; assessment of the current fisheries policy; and re-modelling the policy by incorporating the relevant sections of the SSF Guidelines. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools were used to extract information at stakeholder consultations and the results were analysed using non-parametric statistical tools.

The outcome: Missing links and new SSF policy

Stakeholder consultation workshops discussed diverse issues. The results of these discussions were analysed and their policy implications based on the relevant SSF Guidelines were noted. After re-visiting the current National Fisheries Policy by a group of policy experts and identifying the missing links, a new SSF policy paper was finally prepared.

Tenure rights

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) at stakeholder consultation workshops revealed a number of incidences where the rights of fishers were violated, such as the acquisition of beach areas for tourism, leading to loss of anchorage sites, beach-seining sites, space available for craft and gear repair and fish processing. It also came up that large-scale mechanized craft and gear have taken away resources which were traditionally available to the small-scale and artisanal fishers. There were also concerns about rights that fishers want to possess and enjoy, including access to and use of mangrove forests and land adjoining beaches. In addressing these issues, the need for zonation of the coastal area was suggested.

There were also concerns about rights that fishers want to possess and enjoy, including access to and use of mangrove forest and land adjoining beaches.

Sustainable resource management

The absence of a proper monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS)

*This article is by **Oscar Amarasinghe** (oamarasinghe@yahoo.com), President of the Sri Lanka Forum for Small-Scale Fisheries (SLFSSF), Sri Lanka*

mechanism to monitor coastal resource management was highlighted. The need to decentralize management decisions to the district level with the involvement of local government actors was also underlined. Attention was also focused on treating the coastal zone as one ecosystem and to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are involved in the process of management and decision making at all levels, including youth, women, the differently abled and other marginalized groups. It was agreed that management approaches will have to be holistic, integrated, inclusive, and participatory.

Value chains, post-harvest handling and trade

Post-harvest losses reaching a high level of 40 per cent was noted. One important missing link was the absence of provisions for spatial planning to allow for allocation of space for various fisheries-related activities on the coast; craft anchorage, equipment storage and fish drying, and shore facilities to engage in such activities. The need to introduce scientific fish handling was also emphasized. The importance of government intervention and promotion of the entry of community organizations into fish marketing to break middlemen oligopsonies was highlighted. It was suggested to regulate foreign trade to ensure that the nutrition and food security of the people is not threatened by international trade in fish and fish products.

Occupational health and safety

The lack of concern for safety at sea among fishers was noted. It was agreed that there is a need to build awareness among fishers on the importance of adopting sea-safety measures. Providing fishers with economic access to safety equipment was suggested as an important policy strategy. Apart from on-board safety equipment, concerns were expressed on the need to make landing sites and equipment safe for navigation. Ratification of the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions on safety and work in the fishing sector was also proposed.

Social protection and fisheries insurance

Participants expressed displeasure at the functioning of the Fishermen's Pension Scheme. Fisheries insurance, too, has always been a failure due to information asymmetries between insurers and insurees, leading to non-payment or delays in paying indemnities. It was proposed that a fisheries insurance scheme be operated through the fisher community to reduce these asymmetries. Another related problem was ill-health and injuries caused by bad weather and climate-related hazards. Hence the need to promote fisheries insurance schemes that cover both fishing and climate-related risks was underlined.

Disaster risk and climate change

Despite the fact that Sri Lanka possesses a fairly good weather information system, the participants thought that an 'early-warning' mechanism is still lacking. The possibility of using mobile phones to communicate weather data to fishers was also discussed. In improving ex-ante management of disasters, it was proposed to maintain a registry of fishers, craft and fishing equipment with regular update of information. Moreover, involvement of community organizations and the need for cross-sectoral collaboration and institutional co-ordination to deal with disasters and climate change impacts in the coastal zone were also emphasized.

Gender equality

Discussions revealed that in predominantly Buddhist coastal communities, a woman's employment was still considered a reflection of the man's inability to feed the family. It was proposed that awareness be raised in these communities to show the importance of women's employment in improving family well-being. Moreover, employment is a right of women. The important role played by women in fisheries cooperative societies was also noted and a minimum of 25 per cent representation of women in the committees of cooperatives was recommended. It was a proposed that the government should take steps to remove gender-based discrepancies in wage rates.

Social development

It was agreed that no measures taken towards sustainable resource management would succeed if measures towards social development were not adopted at the same time. Several measures were proposed to guarantee people's access to basic social services: Affordable access to basic education, health, housing and household amenities; according priority to children of fisher communities to fisheries higher education; provision of financial assistance for children of fisher families to continue education during the off-season; development of credit and micro-credit schemes to encourage investment in fisheries; and to enable the poor and vulnerable to access credit.

Capacity development

It was proposed to make fishing communities aware of new fishing techniques and be trained in them, especially in deep-sea fishing technology, post-harvest processing and alternative income-generation activities. While there is so much interest today in sustainable use of resources, conservation and management, it was disclosed that fishing communities are hardly made aware of the diverse measures needed to be adopted to achieve the goals of sustainability. Thus, it was proposed to build capacities of members of fishing communities in new fishing techniques, deep-sea fishing technology, post-harvest processing, alternative livelihoods, resource conservation and co-management. The need to provide training to women and school dropouts in post-harvest processing and other ancillary activities was also recognized.

Empowering community organizations

As a means of building capacities of fishing communities in undertaking management functions, it was proposed to provide training facilities to officials of fisheries co-operatives in resource conservation and management, financial management and principles of cooperation. Statements concerning the dissemination of policy documents, laws, rules and regulations in a manner fisheries communities understand easily, and the need to consult fisheries co-operatives in the design, planning and implementation of fisheries and other development projects were also proposed to be incorporated into the National Fisheries Policy.

The way forward

The process of the SSF Guidelines implementation led to the formulation of a SSF policy paper, which included a number of policy strategies that were absent in the National Fisheries Policy, 2018. All consultations and policy workshops were carried out with the participation of State actors, academics, researchers, civil society and community organizations. The Secretary of the Ministry of Fisheries attended the final policy workshop as the keynote speaker.

It is now necessary to get the government approval for the revised policy document, incorporating the new policy paper. As it became evident from country-wide consultations, the full benefits of the policy process can only be reaped if

(i) the management process is made participatory, inclusive, integrated and holistic;

(ii) co-management platforms are established at the local level, rising up to the national level;

(iii) capacities of State actors and communities are built to participate effectively in management decision making;

(iv) community organizations are empowered and their active involvement in development and management decision making is ensured; and

(v) actions are taken to invest in social development, including gender equity, working conditions, social protection and insurance. These actions will ensure that the revised fisheries policy meets the goal of securing sustainable small-scale fisheries.

For more

https://www.icsf.net/en/samudra/article/EN/79-4352-Wellbeing-Aspir.html
Wellbeing Aspirations

https://www.icsf.net/en/samudra/article/EN/80-4368-Aiming-for-Holi.html
Aiming for Holistic Management

https://igssf.icsf.net/en/page/1088-Sri%20Lanka.html
Implementing the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication in Sri Lanka, SLFSSF and ICSF

Aiming for Holistic Management

A workshop to strengthen small-scale fishery communities in the context of the SSF Guidelines was held on 28 September 2018 at the National Science Foundation in Colombo, Sri Lanka

A workshop was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka for the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). The workshop, held on 28th September, 2018 was attended by 45 participants from the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development (MFARD), the Director General of the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development (DFARD), National Aquaculture Development Authority (NAQDA) and Ceylon Fisheries Corporation (CFC), and 15 officers from Coast Conservation Department (CCD), Agriculture Department, Ministry of Tourism, Department of Wildlife, Coast Guard (Navy) and Marine Environmental Protection Agency (MEPA). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Representative in Sri Lanka, Nina Brandstrup, was the Chief Guest of the event.

It was noted that political commitment is necessary, as is community empowerment and capacity building...

Senior Professor Upali Amarasinghe, Joint Secretary of the Sri Lanka Forum for Small-Scale Fisheries (SLFSSF) presented the SSF Guidelines and dealt with issues of governance of tenure, including the need to identify and respect the rights of fishers to fish resources, land (beaches) and adjacent areas, and of gender equality and gender mainstreaming. Professor Oscar Amarasinghe, President of the SLFSSF, spoke about sustainable resource management, co-management, value chains and post-harvest practices including fish processing by women, social development and the need to empower fishing community organisations. The need for management to be integrated, inclusive, participatory and holistic was highlighted.

After the technical sessions, the participants were divided into four groups with each group being given two topics for discussion. The group discussions were conducted by Dr. Nilantha De Silva with the help of students from the University of Ruhuna.

The first group discussed the following topics:

(a) Responsible Governance of Tenure

Overlapping laws were identified as a key issue hindering the governance of tenure. Other issues such as the loss of beach access; the lack of appropriate regulations and enforcement; and conflicts between resource users were also discussed. For each issue, the various actors with a stake in coastal and marine tenure, including the government departments for Fisheries, Tourism, Wildlife, Forest, Environment, Irrigation, CCD, MEPA, fishing communities, the shipping and tourism industries, etc., were identified. Responsible nodal agencies for coordination and implementation were also identified. It was noted that political commitment is necessary, as is community empowerment and capacity building. The group recommended that a national committee for all aquatic environments (inland and marine) be established.

This article was prepared by ***Oscar Amarasinghe*** *(oamarasinghe@yahoo.com),* ***Nilantha De Silva,*** *with the assistance of* ***Shiwanthika Dharmsiri, Kaumi Piyasiri, Chamini Dinushika, Shanika Weralugolla*** *and* ***Hareesha Sandaruwani,*** *Sri Lanka, and* ***D.K. Ahana Lakshmi*** *and* ***Manas Roshan****, India*

(b) Sustainable Resource Management

The group discussed how the lack of knowledge about the ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF) is a major lacuna, which points to the need for comprehensive studies by the National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA) and universities, with the support of funding organizations and the MFARD. Political support is also needed to conduct national level awareness and monitoring programmes for sustainable resource management. The group called for regulations, based on well-designed studies, to be formulated by the fisheries ministry and relevant policy makers, such as National Science & Technology Commission (NASTEC). Another problem is the failure to recognize research output and the lack of facilities to conduct scientific research. It was suggested that research be translated into policy and sufficient funds allocated for filling research gaps. The group also discussed the need for a national level monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) system for small-scale fisheries.

(c) Establishing Co-Management Platforms

In the case of existing co-management platforms, provisions to declare fisheries management areas and fisheries management committees have been made in Act No. 35 of 2013. The deficiencies include the lack of funds for implementation of co-management practices; dysfunctional national advisory committees and inadequate community consultation. To improve these, it was suggested that there be separate budgetary allocations for co-management, and areas be identified where co-management can be implemented. Collaboration between the MFARD, Treasury, district secretaries and all stakeholders in the fisheries sector is critical.

(d) Community Organizations

Fisheries Co-operative Societies (FCS) are the existing community organizational structures and play an important role in co-management. Rural Fisheries Organizations (RFO) deal with inland fisheries co-management. The role of Fisheries Lagoon Management Committees (FLMC) (for lagoons) and Fisheries Management Coordination Committees (FMCC) (for marine fisheries) was also discussed. Several barriers restricting community organizations from fulfilling their roles were identified, one being that cooperatives are not under the control of the fisheries department. Others include the lack of state intervention, fisher participation and funding sources. The group recommended awareness building as a solution to these challenges.

The second group discussed the following topics:

(a) Social Development

Three major gaps were identified for the poor health, sanitation and social development among fishing communities: inadequate drinking water, poor awarenees and facilities for sanitation and insecure housing. Water purification plants, sanitation drives and housing development and loan schemes were suggested for each issue respectively. Nodal agencies were also identified to allocate responsibilities: the Water Board, the Department of Fisheries, Health, the National Housing Development Authority, local governments, etc.

(b) Employment and Decent Work

The group suggested several actions to ensure occupational health and safety in small-scale fisheries along with the identification of departmental responsibilities: search and rescue mechanism, technology and skill training (DFARD, NAQDA, Navy, Coast Guard); weather alerts and warnings (Department of Meteorology, DFARD); awareness raising on labour laws and rights (DFARD, NAQDA and Department of Labour); vessel safety and life-saving equipment (DFARD, NAQDA and CEYNOR); and health programmes (DFARD, Ministry of Health).

(c) Gender Issues

Several issues related to gender in fisheries were highlighted. A policy for 25 per cent representation of women in all decision making bodies was recommended. The importance of educational programmes as a solution to cultural barriers was discussed, along with issues of women's safety and security at the workplace. The responsibilities of the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, Fisheries and Ministry of Policy Planning were identified. The group observed that unequal wages

between men and women needed to be rectified using better regulation by the Ministry of Labour.

The third group discussed the following topics:

a) Value Chains, Post-Harvest and Trade

The group discussed issues of post-harvest handling losses, destructive or illegal fishing practices (e.g. dynamite), the lack of infrastructure (ice storage, anchorage, etc.), the absence of standardized boat design and low supply of labour. Added to these, appropriate fish grading systems and auctions were not available to small scale fishers, which leads to exploitation by middlemen. Women are underrepresented at landing sites. The lack of awareness among fishermen is a problem, leading to inferior quality and prices (for example, bottom set gill nets were kept for too long in the sea causing a deterioration in fish quality). Promoting fishing activities as a family business (by engaging in diverse links in the value chain), adopting new technology and providing training were suggested by the group. Better access to credit facilities and strengthening of extension services were a few other solutions to iniquities in the value chain.

b) Disaster Risk and Climate Change

In the discussion on disaster risk reduction, the need to strengthen weather warning systems was highlighted. Fishing communities also need proper communication equipment and other technology. The role of the Meteorological Department, Disaster Management Centre, DFAR and community organizations was discussed. An appropriate insurance scheme for fisheries needs to be developed. The effects of climate change on fisheries have not been adequately studied, which requires more funds to be allocated to research agencies. The rights of fishers in instances of beach erosion have not been established and this needs a proper legal framework.

The final group discussed the following topics:

a) Policy Coherence, Institutional Coordination and Collaboration

A persistent issue for small-scale fishers is of government officers flouting regulations and overstepping their authority. Addressing this requires discussions with relevant institutes (for example, on fishing in wildlife reserves). One solution is to inform both officials and communities about rights and duties. Responsible agencies were identified such as departments of Fisheries, Wildlife, NAQDA, NARA, etc. Management plans for small-scale fisheries need to be developed that create common platforms for all stakeholders. Some laws need to be updated while others need implementation through increased coordination between stakeholders. (For example, an update in the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act, 1996 so that roles and responsibilities are clearly specified.)

b) Information, Research and Communication

Lack of robust information (including traditional knowledge) and data about small-scale fisheries was highlighted, with a suggestion to form a dedicated unit to collect and constantly update this information. (The MFARD could lead this initiative, with contributions from universities, technical institutes and NGOs.) The collection, storage and dissemination of information were discussed in detail. The group discussed legal barriers, exchange of information between institutes and the community, the scarcity of trained officers, etc. The group felt that demonstration farms for small-scale fisheries and aquaculture can help in dissemination of new knowledge and training. Communication and collaboration between institutes needs to improve and a mechanism should be developed in universities to identify research areas relevant to the socio-economic needs of small-scale fisheries. This will need funds to be allocated for research, a plea also made by the other groups.

For more

https://sites.google.com/site/smallscalefisheries/events/sri-lanka-1
Process of Building Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Small Scale Fisheries: Proposal from Sri Lankan Fisheries Communities, Negombo, Sri Lanka, 22 November 2011

https://www.icsf.net/en/yemaya/detail/EN/2192.html?
Sri Lanka : Widows' struggles in post-war Sri Lanka

Wellbeing Aspirations

Fisheries co-operatives in Sri Lanka need to be restructured into true co-management platforms to ensure the sustainable use of coastal zone resources

It is now recognized that fishing is not simply catching fish and earning an income, but a way of life which is especially true with small-scale fisheries, which comprise nearly 90 per cent of all fisheries in developing countries. All activities in fishing are firmly embedded in culture, values, customs and traditions of fishing communities, and thus the decisions concerning fishing are generally sociocultural constructs rather than those based on profit-maximizing rational choices. For natural scientists, fishing is an issue of ecosystem health; for social scientists it is a case of social welfare and wellbeing, while for governors and managers, it is policies, laws and management mechanisms for sustainable resource use. However, for fishers it is a particular way or life which meets their wellbeing aspirations – a much broader composite goal. The oft-noted complaint of fishers is that their diverse wellbeing aspirations are not properly understood by the state actors, who often manage fisheries from the top, with little contact with those at the bottom.

Co-operatives have won the faith of the fishers, and their membership has grown to include even the majority of the women fisherfolk.

In such a context, the fisheries co-operatives in Sri Lanka can be considered as true community institutions, catering to the varying needs of the fishers – from the provision of technical and financial services to meeting their diverse wellbeing aspirations. Co-operatives have won the faith of the fishers, and their membership has grown to include even the majority of the women fisherfolk. However, one of the serious weaknesses of the co-operatives has been their failure to play any significant role in resource management, especially in controlling entry into fisheries. On another front, it is to be noted that fishers form only one type of stakeholders using resources in the coastal zone. The others are farmers, industries, tourism stakeholders, etc., whose decisions concerning resource use are often in conflict, requiring cross-sectoral collaboration. Given the dominant position enjoyed by fisheries co-operatives in the coastal zone, restructuring of fisheries co-operatives in Sri Lanka is needed to organize them into true co-management platforms towards attaining the goal of sustainable use of coastal zone resources.

Fisheries co-operatives in Sri Lanka have a post-independence origin. They have been initiated by the government and are organized with the intervention of two government departments, the Department of Co-operative Development and the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, which make them a particular type of 'formal organizations'. This is often perceived as a crucial weakness, and even contrary to the essence of the co-operative movement. The Overseas Co-operative Development Council thus concludes flatly that: "government-controlled parastatals are not true co-operatives". Yet, these 'formal' types of organizations performed a number of functions during the Blue Revolution era (1950-1970), when the new fishing technology was channelled to the asset-poor fishers through the fisheries co-operatives

This article is by ***Oscar Amarasinghe*** *(oamarasinghe@yahoo.com), President of the Sri Lanka Forum for Small-Scale Fisheries (SLFSSF), Sri Lanka*

with financial assistance in the form of subsidies including subsidized credit. What is important to note is the fact that membership in co-operatives is, in principle, voluntary, and that individual co-operatives enjoy great freedom in planning, organizing and implementing activities aimed at meeting the diverse needs of the community. As it will be shown in this article, Sri Lanka's fisheries co-operatives have a history of being true community organizations, performing an array of functions towards meeting the wellbeing aspirations of their membership: the fishers and their families.

Fisheries co-operatives in Sri Lanka can be traced to 1912, when the Rural Credit Societies were established. Then the Department of Co-operatives, which was established in 1930, took a new interest in the development of credit societies into co-operatives. The first fisheries co-operative was established in 1942, with the objective of providing credit facilities to fishers to acquire craft and gear, and to facilitate fish marketing. From 30 registered societies in 1945, the number grew to 292 by 1972. A complete re-organization of co-operatives was done in that year, when village-level co-operatives were amalgamated to form primary co-operative societies serving a larger area.

The activities of these co-operatives are guided by the Co-operative Societies Act No. 5 of 1972, and the Fisheries Co-operative Constitution. From 45 of such primary societies in 1973, they increased to 845 by the year 2016, with a membership of 95,891. However, only 596 co-operatives remained active, with around 70 per cent of them being concentrated in the north and the east of the country, which were heavily affected by the civil war during the 1983-2009 period. Many of the fisheries co-operatives in Sri Lanka can be characterized as multi-purpose, combining functions such as the provision of credit, technology and insurance; and occasionally, the organization of marketing. Their importance was strongly felt in early 1960s when the government introduced the new capital-intensive Blue Revolution technology: mechanized boats, nylon nets and outboard motors. These were channelled to asset-poor fishers through fisheries co-operatives with subsidies, including subsidized credit. Group guarantees by fellow members resolved the collateral problems and formation of crew groups under a caretaker owner who provided access to large mechanized craft with easy repayment schemes.

By investing in bridging and linking social capital, co-operatives have formed strong social networks horizontally and vertically, to do favours for their membership: training, capacity building, procuring funds for infrastructural development, community welfare, etc. Many a co-operative in Sri Lanka organizes all village cultural and religious events, provide tents, chairs and buffet sets for weddings and for funerals, operate pre-schools and children's parks, organize private tuition classes for school children, etc., thus facilitating the achievement of diverse wellbeing aspirations of their membership.

However, fisheries co-operation also had its drawbacks. From his studies in southern Sri Lanka, the author has shown that co-operatives were used in early days (1960s and 1970s) by politicians to provide favours to their political clientele by fraudulently channeling public goods. When governments changed, new office bearers having political links to the

OSCAR AMARASINGHE

Women from a fisheries co-operative cleaning the garden around the fisheries office near Kalametiya Landing Site, Hambantota, Sri Lanka. The co-operatives' membership has grown to include even the women fisherfolk

party in power were elected, who had easy access to public goods through the political clientele system of the ministers and their aides-de-camp. Thus there have been incidences of collapse of certain co-operatives, due to such political interference and corruption.

The fisheries co-operatives in Sri Lanka were subject to several threats in the past. The first threat was the withdrawal of state assistance and patronage to fisheries co-operatives in 1994 because of the prioritization of defence expenditure over others, which was huge during the 30 years of civil war in the country. This move made some co-operatives defunct or dormant. The second type of threat emanated when the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development (MFARD) introduced a new type of community organization called the 'Landing Site Management Committees' (LSMCs) in 2004, with the aim of bringing in management functions into community-based organizations at the landing site level.

Some of the cooperatives in the south are completely run by women, leaving the men to concentrate on fishing.

About 1,000 such committees were established in the country, and some of the co-operatives were disassembled to join these LSMCs, which were pledged with an initial capital of LKR 1 mn (USD 6214). The LSMCs never functioned and no funds were allocated to them. The third threat came in 2010, when the Ministry of Fisheries established a multi-layered system of Rural Fisheries Organizations (RFOs), and announced that state assistance to small-scale fishers would only be channelled through RFOs. The RFOs functioned only under the MFARD, without any involvement by the Department of Co-operative Development. The MFARD thought that such a format would make things easier in channelling public goods to the 'needy' fishers, and also as a means of controlling community organizations to meet the short-term goals of the political party in power.

By 2017, there were 1,127 such RFOs (both marine and inland) with a membership of 98,748. Although, it has now taken almost eight years since their establishment, the RFOs still remain quite dormant, with no apparent role to perform. They have no clear vision and mission and, so far, have not performed a single function that fisheries co-operatives used to perform. Yet, they are the agents of the state, who grant approval for various requests made by the membership and recipients of any public goods channelled to fisheries. In fact, what has happened in many parts of the country was that, the existing co-operatives have assumed the name RFO, with the same membership and same office bearers. Thus, while co-operatives and RFOs are different by name, the membership remains the same in most areas.

Nevertheless, in the minds of many fishers, fisheries co-operatives still remain the most dominant type of community organization in coastal areas. Many continue to function in an environment of zero state assistance, but as strong social networks based on trust and reciprocity among people. Quite interestingly, the co-operatives, as against RFOs, have a strong involvement of women. Some of the co-operatives in the south are completely run by women, leaving the men to concentrate on fishing. By providing group guarantees, they have invested in plant nurseries, boutiques, organic farming, etc., earning supplementary incomes. In short, fisheries co-operatives still function as the only form of fisheries community organization that represent the interests of fishers and their families and work towards meeting their wellbeing aspirations.

While fisheries co-operatives have performed fairly well in meeting an array of wellbeing aspirations of the fisherfolk, they have failed tremendously in managing the fisheries resources, especially in controlling entry.

Bioeconomic modelling studies in the southern marine fisheries of Sri Lanka have shown that high rates of resource exploitation (higher levels of effort) occurred in fishing villages which had well-functioning co-operatives (Bata Atha South Fisheries Co-operative in the Hambantota District

is an example). In fact, in these villages, fishers have entered the fishery quite freely and have exploited the resources heavily. Co-operatives have contributed to this situation by providing fishers with the means to access natural resources and the required livelihood capitals to facilitate this access. This has to be related to the origins of the fisheries co-operative movement in the early 1940s, when co-operatives were expected to provide the membership with credit facilities to purchase craft and gear, which is a function tantamount to 'facilitating entry'. Thus, fisheries co-operatives became lending institutions with a diversity of credit schemes, lending money not only to acquire fishing equipment, but also to meet consumption needs and insurance needs (through instant loan schemes). The well-functioning co-operatives, in this respect, were even elevated to the status of Fisheries Banks ('Idiwara Banks').

The restructured primary fisheries co-operatives that were born in 1972 had assumed a large array of functions to improve welfare facilities for the fishing populations. They were totally welfare-centric, with hardly any concern for resource management. Note should also be made of two important principles of the peasants in rural Sri Lanka – the principle of equality and the right to subsistence. All who are born in the village have a right to live and, should enjoy equal rights of access to resources. The fisheries co-operatives, as true community organizations, are expected to abide by these principles of the peasantry. Thus, even when the current fishing pressure is high, they are forced to assist whoever wants to fish. Although this weakness is understood by co-operatives, they are not in a position to introduce entry controls, which will challenge the very basis of the establishment of fisheries co-operatives.

Given that fisheries co-operatives command a high degree of confidence and faith among the membership as their true representatives, the fisheries co-operative format could be made use of in introducing measures that will also ensure a healthy ecosystem, with appropriate restructuring to achieve these ends. But fisheries form only one component of the coastal ecosystem, and fishers are only one stakeholder group in the coastal zone, with farmers, tourism stakeholders, industries and others forming a group of multi-stakeholders exploiting the same bundle of coastal resources. Therefore, decisions regarding coastal zone management need cross-sectoral collaboration to avoid conflicts among stakeholders having different interests and different legal orders. Although they remain latent, conflicts among diverse stakeholders in the coastal zone exist. Yet, attempts at resolving conflicts through cross-sectoral collaboration, with the participation of all relevant stakeholders, are hard to find.

The recently developed Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) provide a good starting point, with their emphasis on holistic, inclusive, participatory and integrated approaches to fisheries management.

Recent studies in south Sri Lanka provide evidence of the very strong position enjoyed by the fisheries cooperatives...

Recent studies in south Sri Lanka provide evidence of the very strong position enjoyed by the fisheries co-operatives in comparison to other community organizations in the coastal zone, with respect to the provision of livelihood capitals, transparency and accountability of operations, and willingness and capacity to adopt some of the key SSF Guidelines.

Leadership role

It is also interesting to note that all non-fisheries stakeholders in the coastal zone believe that fisheries co-operatives could take the leadership in making decisions concerning the management of resources in the coastal zone. Evidently, due to the diverse tasks and uncertainties inherent in fishing – seasonality, high incidence of damage to, and loss of, craft and gear and fishing days, need for supplementary income, etc. – fisheries co-operatives have risen

up to provide a host of services to the membership, including the provision of livelihood capital, which is not the case with other community institutions like the agricultural co-operatives or rural development societies.

Moreover, through the experience they have gained in managing fisheries co-operatives to provide the above services to the membership, the co-operative leaders have become very strong and powerful individuals in making decisions concerning coastal resource use. Yet, the latter necessitates that fisheries co-operatives function as true interactive management platforms, with the participation of all relevant stakeholders. Such a change requires the incorporation of concerns of resource management into the constitution of fisheries co-operatives, assuming the role of a cross-sectoral collaborative body to perform the required management functions.

Entry into coastal fisheries is now made fairly difficult by the recent state regulations banning the construction of small fibreglass boats, which are the mainstay of coastal fishing in Sri Lanka. Following this ban, some co-operatives, like the Godawaya Fisheries Co-operative in Hambantota district, have already taken steps to set limits on all types of coastal craft operating in its landing site. The co-operative is also controlling the entry of tourists into the Godawaya beach, fearing that tourism would have adverse influences on the youth, culture and traditions of the village.

...fisheries co-operatives have risen up to provide a host of services to the membership, including the provision of livelihood capital...

On the one hand, the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act of 1996, provides for the establishment of Fisheries Management Areas and Fisheries Committees within such areas, which are entrusted with management decisionmaking. In fact, the MFARD has started establishing co-management platforms for export-oriented fisheries, with the participation of all stakeholders in designated fisheries management areas in a number of districts. The process has been facilitated by funds provided by international donors. But these committees became defunct after some time for a number of reasons: withdrawal of foreign assistance; absence of a leader organization to work towards achieving the goals of co-management; and the apathy of the state authorities to continue with the process. In this whole process, the fisheries co-operatives have been relegated to the background because of the government's lack of interest in empowering them. On the other hand, the RFOs remained outside the mainstream of activities because they commanded no faith or trust among people, and did not enjoy a dominant status among diverse stakeholders in the coastal zone.

The focus group discussions held recently revealed that the whole process of integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) could be organized under the leadership of the fisheries co-operatives, which could function as co-management platforms with the participation of all coastal resource users, state actors, civil society organizations (CSOs) and other parties, including women and marginalized groups. The mere formation of such platforms itself will not resolve management issues, unless the management process is made integrated, inclusive, participatory and holistic. This requires, among other things, the government's will to recognize the important role played by fisheries co-operatives as a dominant actor in the coastal zone, the will to empower them and abolish the dormant RFOs. A change of this nature will not only put under way a strong process of ICZM, but also introduce a mechanism to resolve conflicts among coastal resource users.

For more

http://www.coop.gov.lk/web/images/acts/1972-5/1972_05_E.pdf
Co-operative Societies Law No. 5 of 1972

Moving On

Promoting a rights-based approach to sustainable small-scale fisheries development through participatory and consultative processes was discussed at a workshop in Colombo

The *South Asia FAO–BOBLME Regional Consultation on the Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines)* was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, during 23—26 November 2015. The event was organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) Project. It was co-hosted by the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources of Sri Lanka, and additional financial support was provided by the Government of Norway. About 42 participants from Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka attended the workshop, including representatives of governments, regional and international organizations, fisherfolk organizations, CSOs/NGOs, academia and other relevant actors.

The overall objective of the workshop was to raise awareness and support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines in the region. The workshop started with an introductory presentation by FAO, explaining how the process of preparing the Guidelines took place since 2008, with the enrolment of about 4,000 stakeholders who interacted with one another in a series of conferences, workshops and consultations held in a number of countries. The role of BOBLME in this initiative by contributing to institutional coordination, information, research, communication and capacity building was also explained.

The status of SSF in South Asia

An array of presentations by public, private and civil society actors explained the status of fisheries in their own countries. The country representatives stressed the importance of SSF in the region due to the large numbers of rural populations engaged in fishing, both marine and inland, and the greater share of SSF in the total fish landings. The major issues highlighted by all included the need to promote the sustainable use of fisheries resources, promote participatory decisionmaking and management, empower small-scale fishers, provide them with market access, strictly enforce laws, and protect the aquatic resources. Moreover, emphasis was laid on gender concerns, especially the need to empower women. Everybody stressed the need to identify and recognize the rights of fishers. Some of the important considerations that emerged during discussions included the importance of the ecosystem approach to fisheries management, engagement of fishing communities in decisionmaking, integration of research outputs into policy, and capacity development of all parties concerned in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. Several voids in fisheries research were also identified, which included, among others, the need to find out the most appropriate interactive platforms, mechanisms of empowering fishing communities, guiding technological change and institutional change along a socially

The country representatives stressed strongly the importance of SSF in the region due to the large numbers of rural populations engaged in fishing, both marine and inland, and the large share of SSF in the total fish landings.

*This report is by **Oscar Amarasinghe** (oamarasinghe@yahoo.com), Professor, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka, and Member, ICSF*

optimal direction, and addressing issues of legal pluralism.

The country representatives also discussed issues specific to their countries. Both India and Bangladesh expressed serious concern about the process of marginalization of fishers, including women in the processing sector. Maldives pointed out that sea level rise (due to climate change) is a serious risk to SSF, while for Bangladesh, vulnerability was strongly related to 'ownership of fishing assets slipping out of the hands of the small-scale fishers'. Sri Lanka expressed increased concern on safety of fishers and the lack of alternative employment opportunities for fishing populations.

Participants also discussed the good practices adopted by their countries in dealing with some of the above issues. Sri Lanka boasted of a very strong legal framework and the functioning of a number of co-management platforms (especially in lagoon fisheries), rights of access to resources established through the construction/declaration of beach access roads, and recognition of beach seine *padu* and stake-net fisheries. Participants from India explained how self-help groups and cooperatives deal effectively with social and economic issues, while fishworker unions deal with the 'rights' of small-scale fishers. Representatives from Maldives and Bangladesh explained how small-scale fishers are granted access to land for fish processing. Maldives have also been able to set a floor price for tuna. With respect to transboundary issues, the shared management plan for the *Hilsa* fishery between Bangladesh and India was highlighted.

Concerns and suggestions

Through group discussions, the participants identified the key areas of concern and the actions proposed to deal with them.

i. Governance of tenure in SSF and resources management

The participants recognized the need to legalise customary tenure rights, both in fisheries resources and land, and proposed that efforts should be made by CSOs and academia/researchers to identify and document such rights and advocate their recognition by governments. The need to identify and document incidences of human rights violations and address them in collaboration with fisher community organizations and national human rights institutions was also highlighted. The absence of a 'fisher voice' in the process of decisionmaking was also a major concern.

Participants stressed the importance of effective and meaningful consultation of fishing communities. Co-management was recognized as an effective mechanism for incorporating fisher interests, including those of women and marginalized groups, into fisheries management. This needs capacity building and empowerment of fishing communities, who will engage in effective resources management both at the local and national levels. Establishment of multi-tier platforms to address regional management issues and transboundary fishing issues was also proposed. The participants added that governments should ensure that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and international human rights conventions, including the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, are applied to all fisheries activities.

ii. Social development, employment, decent work and gender equality

Development of human capacities in SSF was identified as one of the most urgent needs and a prerequisite to adopt holistic approaches to fisheries development. Training of fishers and fisherwomen to earn decent incomes and financial support to start up productive activities and improvement in the provision of information (for example, through information and communications technology ICT) were also recognized as important. The participants stressed the need to provide basic needs, such as housing, secure tenure rights, sanitation and drinking water. The need to develop/

strengthen and operationalize public health schemes, fisheries insurance schemes and subsidized loan schemes (in particular for women) was also brought to light. The participants expressed concern on the issue of empowerment of fishing communities. Not only the establishment of community organizations, but also the provision of capacity development and strengthening of the link between community organizations and the government, was emphasized. It was also observed that the small-scale fisheries sector often fails to provide equal opportunities and a safe and fair source of income, in particular for women and in inland fisheries. The poor bargaining power of fishing communities vis-à-vis the middlemen, had pushed down fishing incomes, which could be addressed by developing alternative means of support generally rendered by merchants. It was suggested that minimum wage schemes for small-scale fishworkers be examined, as also the development and/or implementation of policies in support of gender equality and gender mainstreaming. Strengthening and expansion of regional collaboration among CSOs to share experiences on the implementation of the SSF Guidelines and resolving transboundary and other common issues were also strongly recommended.

iii. Value chains, post-harvest and trade

The role of women in post-harvest activities received great attention. Organizing women into cooperatives, training on entrepreneurship, promoting micro-finance assistance, provision of low-interest credit, promotion of community saving and credit schemes, were all recognized as important steps in facilitating women's involvement in the fish value chain. Distribution of benefits from trade and returns from fish and fishery products were noted to be 'unfair'. The need for fisher organizations to involve in bargaining vis-à-vis buyers, collective purchasing by cooperatives, reducing cost of fishing inputs, effective dissemination of market information and the need to support post-harvest infrastructures were suggested as remedial measures. Another important concern of the participants was the issue of 'safety at sea'. It was suggested that safety of small-scale fishers be improved through the provision of safety equipment, training on safety at sea, designing effective insurance schemes, and improved communication and early warning systems.

The way forward

The following were identified as the steps to be taken by diverse stakeholder groups to actively promote the implementation of the SSF Guidelines at the national and regional levels:

Role of government actors and other participants

The government participants agreed to establish the SSF focal points in their fisheries administrations and other authorities, as appropriate. All participants agreed to organize formal and informal debriefing meetings to provide information about the outcomes of the workshop within their respective administrations and organizations and to disseminate the SSF Guidelines and the outcomes and recommendations of the workshop to relevant meetings. It was also suggested to advocate for the establishment of a regional oversight committee with at least one government and one CSO member per country (with due attention to gender balance) to follow up and monitor (for example, through email groups) the process, building potentially on existing initiatives (like the Asia Alliance on Small-scale Fisheries).

Role of CSOs, CBOs and NGOs

The CSOs agreed that they should develop additional language versions of the SSF Guidelines, with the help of the respective governments and the FAO. The NGOs and CBOs/CSOs are to prepare posters, simplified versions, short movies, and radio features, again with the support of their

governments, in order to raise awareness about the SSF Guidelines. CSOs also agreed to appoint national focal points for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

Role of international organizations, FAO and BOBLME

The participants thought that it is best for the FAO to provide guidance for the preparation of National Plans of Action to support the implementation of the SSF Guideline and support the monitoring of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. It was also suggested that the BOBLME project should include support to follow up activities after the workshop and the implementation of the SSF Guidelines at regional and national levels during its proposed second phase.

Role of research institutes and universities

It was recommended that academia and researchers should contribute a chapter on the SSF Guidelines implementation to a planned publication of the research network Too Big To Ignore (TBTI). It was also proposed that the research institutes and universities need to look into new research areas relevant to the application of the SSF Guidelines, which might include socioeconomic data collection, design and implementation (including gender-disaggregated data), provision of information on the socioeconomic status of fishing communities and the aquatic habitats through participatory research, and making initiatives to integrate the SSF Guidelines in fisheries course curricula.

Finally, the participants noted the need to secure funding, which, among other things, include engagement with international and regional development partners through bilateral donors and embassies at the country level, and with new projects (including BOBLME phase 2). The need to explore opportunities of joining hands with NGOs operating outside fisheries and working with human rights and social development institutions was also brought to attention. Provisions to be made for the implementation of SSF guidelines and promoting interaction with relevant non-fisheries ministries and departments at all levels, and mainstreaming of SSF Guidelines in relevant policies, strategies, plans as well as public-private partnerships in support of the SSF Guidelines were also recognized.

A concluding remark

In summary, there was general agreement among the participants at the workshop that sustainable development of small-scale fisheries shall be based on proper governance and management of the natural resource base and the people who depend on it, through the establishment of effective interactive platforms, such as fisher community organizations and appropriate co-management platforms, which will adopt holistic and integrated approaches, while ensuring that the rights and responsibilities of the participating actors, including women and marginalized groups, are clearly laid down and respected, and that decisions are made through a process of consultation, collaboration and coordination of all actors concerned. Such a process shall encompass capacity building and empowerment of small-scale fishers, providing them with the required social protection, and meeting their well-being aspirations through proper social development interventions and adoption of appropriate legal instruments.

For more

igssf.icsf.net/en/page/1066-Interesting%20articles%20on%20SSF%20Guidelines.html
Small-scale Fisheries Guidelines

www.fao.org/srilanka/news/detail-events/en/c/356820/
FAO-BOBLME South Asia Regional Consultation on SSF Guidelines

Restoring Past Glory

The Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (RFLP) promises a brighter future for fisheries in the Negombo lagoon in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's Negombo lagoon has been very much in the news recently, but for all the wrong reasons. Several reports have highlighted the severe environmental degradation in, and around, the lagoon and the concerns of lagoon fishing communities, residents, religious leaders and civil society representatives. However, things may be starting to look brighter following the development and implementation of a lagoon management plan that, for the first time, has involved all concerned stakeholders.

...RFLP has worked with the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources to bring together a wide range of stakeholders, including government agencies and fishers to develop a fisheries management plan for the lagoon.

Since 2010, the Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (RFLP), which is funded by Spain and executed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), has been working with the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources to address some of the problems facing Negombo lagoon.

These challenges are considerable. The high population density of the fast-growing city of Negombo, and a concentration of industries, tourism and fishing and fishery-related activities have combined to make heavy demands on the 3,164 ha lagoon and its environment.

The major problems facing the lagoon include the discharge of sewage and the dumping of solid waste from homes and businesses. Thousands of homes have been built that encroach onto the lagoon water area, while hundreds of motorized fishing boats pollute it and endanger the once-rich lagoon fishery. As a result, fish caught in some areas of the estuary are reported to be tainted with kerosene and unfit for human consumption.

Lagoon banks are cluttered with temporary wooden jetties used for unloading fish, most built without any approval. These adversely impact water movement, accelerating sedimentation, a situation made worse by illegal land filling for encroachment.

Valuable habitats such as mangrove and seagrasses that provide critical nursery habitats for fishery resources, aquatic fauna and birds have also suffered. Indiscriminate land reclamation has led to significant reduction of mangrove cover, while the advent of shrimp farming in the area in the mid-1980s, the use of certain types of fishing gear, and digging for worms used as a feed in shrimp hatcheries have destroyed much of the seagrass.

Recognizing the scope of the problem, RFLP has worked with the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources to bring together a wide range of stakeholders, including government agencies and fishers, to develop a fisheries management plan for the lagoon.

Illegal encroachment

"Fishers were frustrated by their inability to address a host of non-fishery-related issues such as illegal encroachment into the lagoon, destruction of mangroves, effluents

*This article is by **Manoja Liyana Arachchi** (Manoja.Liyanaarachchi@fao.org), Communications Assistant, RFLP Sri Lanka, and **Steve Needham** (steve.needham@fao.org), Information Officer, RFLP Regional Office, Bangkok, Thailand*

and waste discharge, which adversely impacted fish and fisheries," said RFLP's Leslie Joseph. "The RFLP concept of wider stakeholder participation in fisheries management was, therefore, seen as an ideal opportunity for all stakeholders to share responsibility, to be accountable and to be actively involved in managing the fishery and conserving the lagoon environment."

To ensure more representative management of the lagoon, a Fisheries Management Co-ordinating Committee has been formed. As the Fisheries Act limited membership of fisheries committees to fishers only, changes had to be first made so that the legislation would allow the participation of other stakeholders. As a result, in addition to fishers, other institutions or administrations with legal mandate to control or manage activities that may adversely impact the lagoon ecosystem have become more actively involved.

The development of the lagoon fisheries management plan was a priority for the Fisheries Management Co-ordinating Committee. Taking part in discussions to formulate this plan were representatives of the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (MFAR), the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DFAR), the District Secretariat, Divisional Secretariats, the Provincial Council, the Coastal Conservation Department (CCD), the National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA), the Central Environmental Authority, the Marine Environment Protection Authority, the Wildlife Department, the Forest Department, the Navy, and fisher representatives from the Negombo Lagoon Fisheries Management Authority.

The plan was agreed upon by all stakeholders at the last Fisheries Management Co-ordinating Committee meeting held on 31 July 2012. It contains measures to protect livelihoods of genuine lagoon fishers through a strictly enforced licensing system, and ensures sustainable utilization of resources through enhanced monitoring, control, and surveillance.

Lagoon fishers have agreed on fishing times and fishing areas for some of the major fishing gears and also to ban some environmentally harmful fishing methods. The plan also features a strong focus on conserving the lagoon environment and biodiversity. Relevant stakeholder agencies in the Fisheries Management Co-ordinating Committee are called upon to establish legalized lagoon boundaries as well as minimize pollution and the adverse impacts from fishing and aquaculture activities. In order to arrest the fast-dwindling mangrove resources that are important for the sustenance of fish resources and other ecosystem services, the plan also recognizes the need to prepare and implement a mangrove management plan for the lagoon, integrated with the fishery management plan.

Elements of the management plan are already being put into place. RFLP has provided the district fisheries office with a boat and an engine to strengthen its monitoring and enforcement capability. NARA has been entrusted with the task of introducing a fish-catch monitoring programme for the lagoon. Furthermore, arrangements are being made to seek approval from relevant stakeholder agencies in the

V VIVEKANANDAN

A boat anchored at the Negombo lagoon. The major problems facing the lagoon include the discharge of sewage and dumping of solid waste from homes and businesses

Fisheries in the Negombo lagoon

Negombo lagoon is a shallow basin estuary covering approximately 3,164 ha, situated about 20 km north of Colombo.

The number of finfish species identified from Negombo lagoon range from 82 to 133. More than half are marine species entering the lagoon from the sea. The composition varies seasonally with dominant finfish varieties including milkfish, catfish, half beaks and grey mullet. Key shrimp species include *Penaeus indicus, P. semisulcatus, Metapenaeus moyebi, M. dobsoni, and M. elegans.*

According to 2010 figures, 3,310 fishers fish in the lagoon. Of these 2,581, or 78 per cent, fish full-time, while 728, or 22 per cent, are part-time fishers who move into the lagoon only during the southwest monsoon period from May to October, when sea fishing is difficult because of strong currents and high waves.

In 2010, the fishing fleet of 1,358 was made up of 869 (64 per cent) outrigger canoes and 492 (36 per cent) log rafts.

Over 30 fishing gears and methods are reported in use. Traditional methods include the cast-net, stake-net, brush pile, angling, crab pots, scoop-net, fish krall, and dip-net. Other more modern methods include the hand trawl, drift gillnet, trammel net, and lagoon seine.

Fisheries Management Co-ordinating Committee on a draft mangrove management plan.

Among the key issues identified is the lack of clearly defined and legally identified lagoon boundaries. This is a critical factor responsible for illegal encroachment into the lagoon and destruction of valuable mangrove resources. In the absence of legally recognized boundaries, authorities have not been able to take violators to court.

Attempts to establish boundaries around Negombo lagoon have been made before. From 2002 to 2004, an Asian Development Bank project demarcated a 10-m land corridor from the high-water mark and installed 2,400 boundary posts fixed 10 m apart around the lagoon perimeter.

However, this land corridor was never acquired by the State and remains in the possession of individual owners. Encroachment has continued, while 686 boundary posts have simply disappeared.

Under the new management plan, efforts are again being made to establish legally defined boundaries for the lagoon. RFLP has signed an agreement with the District Secretary of the Gampaha District for this purpose, and has allocated close to SLR 4 mn for this task.

Work has already commenced and the first batch of boundary poles is being installed by the Negombo Lagoon Fisheries Management Authority, under the guidance of the District Fisheries Office, Negombo.

Once all boundary poles are in place, the Survey Department will conduct surveys using global positioning system (GPS), and prepare a Preliminary Plan. This will detail strategic reference or control points of the lagoon boundaries, and provide a legal basis upon which to identify any future encroachments and to carry out any enforcement measures.

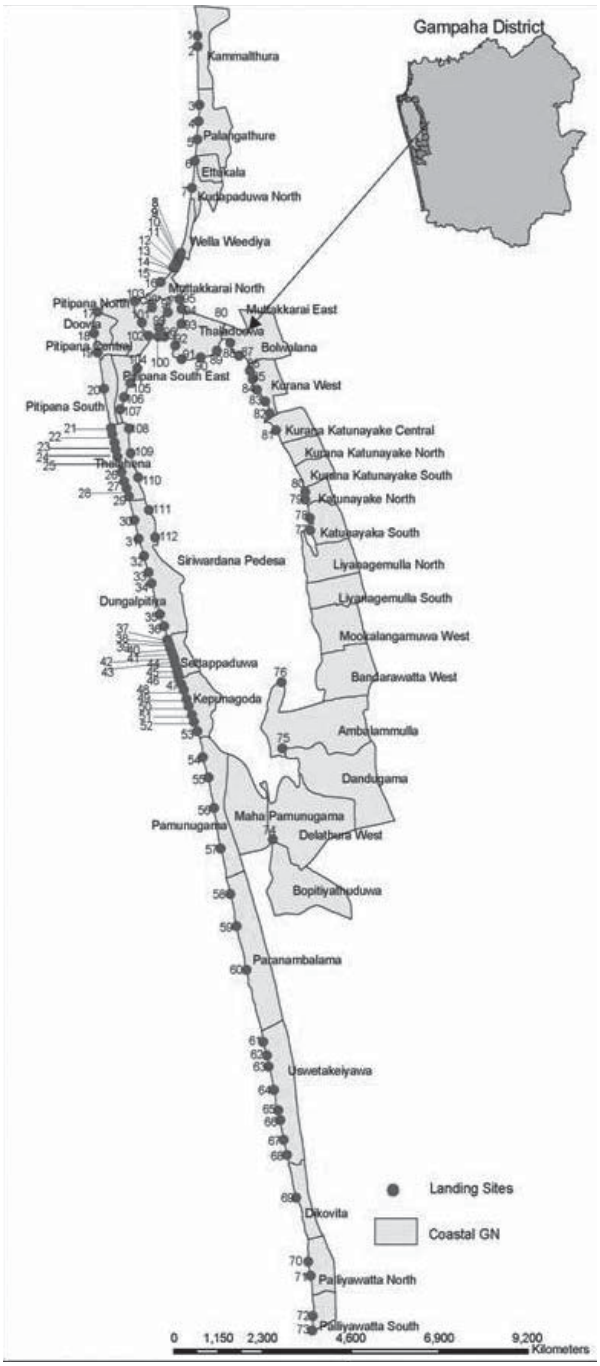
According to RFLP's Leslie Joseph, this will make a major contribution to the protection of the lagoon. "Lack of legally defined boundaries in the past was an impediment to prosecution. With the availability of a Preliminary Plan and legally defined boundaries, the authorities will be able to counter any illegal encroachment even if boundary poles disappear," he said.

Participatory approach

Taking an integrated and participatory approach to the management of Negombo lagoon involving all concerned stakeholders is, without doubt, a positive move. However, the challenges facing Negombo lagoon after decades of mismanagement

remain formidable. Concerted long-term effort, in terms of both financial commitment and stakeholder support, will be needed if these early steps are to be built upon and the lagoon restored to its past glory.

Landing Sites of Negombo Fisheries District



Source : Coastal Information, Department of Coast Conservation, Sri Lanka

For more

www.rflp.org/Negombo_fisheries_plan
Fisheries Management Plan for Sri Lanka's Negombo Lagoon takes Shape

www.fisheries.gov.lk/
Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Development