

8. FISHERFOLKS AND WORKERS IN FISHING ACTIVITIES

8.1 Labor in the Southeast Asia Fishing Industry

The FAO statistics indicated that Asia contributed the largest number of fishers and fish farmers compared to other regions of the world, where 87% of the total people are employed in the sector (FAO, 2016a). Such number comprises those engaged in different fishery sub-sectors, either part-time or full time, and regardless of their scales of engagement. Recognizing the importance of fishers and workers in fisheries sectors, the Southeast Asian countries have been confronted with pressing concerns on the need to combat IUU fishing associated with labor-related issues, as well as on the status of people engaged in fishing and related activities in the region.

The increasing demand of workers in the fisheries sectors to serve the expansion of intra-regional and international trade of countries in Southeast Asia, results not only in large numbers of migrant workers getting onboard to seek work opportunities in other countries but also large groups of workforce moving from one country to another. Receiving countries therefore need to take serious attention in addressing the issues and concerns in fisheries labor, especially the allegations that these workers receive low wages, their social security is either non-existent or inadequate, unskilled in relation to fishing operations, received inadequate training before working onboard fishing vessels, not aware of the requirements for safety at sea, possess fake or no legal documents, subjected to forced labor, child labor, human trafficking, experience poor working conditions and unfair treatment by employers, and that some fishing vessels do not comply with sea safety requirements (SEAFDEC, 2016e).

Several countries in the region therefore have revised their respective legal frameworks particularly those that are relevant to labor aspects in fisheries (SEAFDEC, 2016e). As an example, vessel owners and skippers in the Philippines are required to provide a guarantee that all crew members are to be treated in accordance with Philippine labor laws, before a fishing license is issued for a vessel. In Indonesia, a special Sub Directorate of Fisheries Labour and Manning a Fishing Vessel was established within the Directorate of Fishing Vessel and Fishing Gears under the Directorate General of Capture Fisheries of the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries. In Thailand, the Royal Ordinance on Fisheries of 2015 includes labor aspects (Art 11), and the Department of Fisheries (DOF) in cooperation with the Department of Labour Protection and Welfare (DLPW) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) had developed a set of four Good Labour Practice (GLP) Guidelines which are pending endorsement by the Government.

Considering that issues on migrant labors and workers are regional in nature and could not be solved by a particular country alone, close communication and cooperation among countries are therefore required taking into consideration the existing “ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers” (ASEAN, 2007). In particular, during the regional consultation organized by SEAFDEC in 2016, it was agreed that the roles and obligations of the “Receiving State” and the “Sending State” should be strengthened, and that establishment and enforcement of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between sending and receiving countries should be promoted (SEAFDEC, 2016e). Moreover, receiving countries should consider developing standard employment contracts and other protection measures, and support the workers through the conduct of specific pre-departure training programs (occupation, language, culture), especially those who intend to work in the fisheries sector while sending countries should provide specific pre-departure training program (occupation, language, culture) for workers who intend to seek employment in the fisheries sector based on the MoU. The Philippines, Indonesia, and Viet Nam actively promote and provide opportunities to fishery labor, and continue to enhance the capacity of their national fishing crew before they go abroad to work in the fisheries sector. Furthermore, countries should also ensure that crew members receive decent working conditions abroad.

Issue on gender also has a very close linkage with the fisheries sector of the region, considering that women provide labor not only before or during fishing activities but also after. The role of women is not only limited to small-scale but also in industrial fisheries as well as in aquaculture, particularly at the processing and marketing stages, as well as in financial management. It is therefore necessary that women should be empowered to be involved in decision-making processes, and the roles of women in fisheries should be emphasized and well recognized. Furthermore, in order that the issue on gender is appropriately addressed in the region, such issue should also be mainstreamed in fisheries and aquaculture development projects at all stages, from planning, implementation, and evaluation, as well as in national fisheries development strategies as appropriate and applicable for the respective countries.

8.2 Safety at Sea, Working Condition, and Safety Onboard Fishing Vessels

In Southeast Asia, the number of registered fishing boats as of 2014 was reported to be approximately 800,000 (SEAFDEC, 2016a), comprising non-powered boats, outboard powered boats, and inboard powered boats; and operating either in the inland, coastal, or marine areas.