

Sida's Marine Initiative and Swedish support for cooperation with ASEAN – SEAFDEC

by Magnus Torell



A New Agreement and Support

On 29th August 2003, an Agreement was signed between the National Swedish Board of Fisheries (NBF) and SEAFDEC for Human Resource Development on the Support of Implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries Management for the ASEAN Region. Activities under the Agreement are funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The Agreement lasts from 2003 to 2006, and marks the starting point for Sida cooperation with SEAFDEC. It will be implemented through the NBF for immediate follow-up.

“an Agreement was signed ... for Human Resource Development on the Support of Implementation of the CCRF for the ASEAN Region”

This article describes the context within which the support is being provided, seen from the perspective of a Sida proposal named Marine Initiative. The article draws on documents pertaining to the Marine Initiative, which was launched in 2001 by Sida's Department for Natural Resources and Environment.

Why the Marine Initiative?

The need to improve the management and conservation of natural resources and the environment in marine and coastal areas, including larger river and lake systems, is nowadays widely recognized. Issues and opportunities related to living aquatic resources and fisheries are very much part of this picture. The outcomes and recommendations from the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002 are a good reflection of this common understanding, with clear targets set for marine fisheries and overcapacity within the fisheries sector.

Since the Stockholm Conference in 1972, Sweden has participated actively in international fora like the WSSD and in negotiations to develop international conventions, and plans of action for their implementation. Sida has also been supportive of various regional approaches for strengthening marine and coastal programs, and initiatives for aquatic resources management in general. Central to the Marine Initiative, and to Sida's belief, is the notion that a regional approach to the management and conservation of marine and coastal resources and the environment is of prime importance. Marine resources, including living aquatic resources and their utilization, have a trans-boundary and regional dimension that requires such a regional approach. Environmental pollution in one country, for example, affects other countries, and in many cases, common fish stocks are harvested on both sides of a border.

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The Marine Initiative is a response both to the need to improve the management of aquatic resources and to the structural problems behind the continuing degradation of the environment. It aims to remedy the causes of such problems, including the divided and uncoordinated responsibilities in managing the development and protection of marine and coastal areas; a division that spans over many sectors, many functions, and includes several levels of decision-making.

The shift in Sida's approach to development and management

The Marine Initiative was developed in response to instructions from the Swedish Government to Sida. The Department for Natural Resources and Environment at Sida was the leading unit in the formulation and launching of the initiative.

The Marine Initiative builds on Sida's long involvement in and experience of Swedish support to regional programs. The Initiative is also a reflection of a general change in Sida's approach to deciding which regional marine programs it supports. Several examples of Swedish support to regional programs in South and Southeast Asia demonstrate Sida's new approach to development and management can be given:

- The Bay of Bengal Program, which went through several phases, switching from a technology development focus to more social and people-focused approaches, with a constant clear fisheries sector base
- Coastal Environment Management in the South China Sea (through the ADB)
- Mekong River Commission (Environment Program)
- AIT Aqua Outreach (through the Asian Institute of Technology in Thailand)
- World Fish Centre (ICLARM) Mekong River Region Wetland Approach



- International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI)
- Present agreements with SEAFDEC, FAO and UNEP COBSEA on fisheries and environmental aspects.

“The Marine Initiative builds on Sida’s long involvement in and experience of Swedish support to regional programs”

These programs reveal a trend from single sector programs, with an initial focus on technology development, with a gradually increasing social focus, towards more environment-based programs and onwards to the present objective of this initiative, which aims to address both fisheries sector and environmental issues by trying to find a balance between fisheries and environmental conservation.

The overarching framework of the Marine Initiative has been defined as follows:

- **The Challenge** – that achievement of sustainable development and alleviation of poverty is not possible without healthy and productive coastal areas and oceans.
- **The Ambition** – that supported activities will contribute to the reduction of poverty through improved food security, based on sustainable use and production, while maintaining the natural resource base.
- **The Vision** – that healthy, well managed and productive seas and coastal ecosystems are prerequisites to building stable and sustainable economies and income-generating opportunities in coastal states.

Sida’s basic principles and approaches

To enable more detailed program planning and dialogue with institutional partners in different parts of the world, Sida has defined a set of basic principles and approaches:

- More effective coordination, and the integration of the management of various sectors is needed.

- Due to their inherent trans-boundary character, marine and coastal interventions demand coordination between global, regional and national initiatives.

- The utilization of natural resources in marine and coastal areas must be sustainable. This requires clear and well-planned institutional framework as well as regional and national plans of actions. These will allow for development while at the same time minimizing negative effects on the ecosystems and the environment.



- Conflict mitigation efforts should be prioritized with regards to the management of shared and common resources within and between countries.

- Planning, development and management of specific ecosystems and natural resources should be implemented through decentralization of responsibilities and financial resources to the level of utilization.

“...many regional bodies responsible for either environment or fisheries have struggled to fulfil their mandates and ambitious targets”

A general impression emerging from the preparatory work for the Marine Initiative was that many regional bodies responsible for either environment or fisheries have struggled to fulfil their mandates and ambitious targets, for many different reasons. There have been



problems adapting and adjusting legal and institutional frameworks, in addition to matters such as the limited availability of human and financial resources. The latter is a result of the difficulty of obtaining financial and human resources from member countries for which these resources are often very limited. To remedy this issue, development and technical assistance could be instrumental, during the establishment and build-up stage of these regional organizations, to support ambitions to develop efficient partner institutions,

especially with regards to fisheries and the marine environment. The aim would be to provide platforms for long-term interventions based on resources available in member countries. Activities to facilitate better and more efficient links between different regional organizations should be given attention and supported.

In the development of the Marine Initiative, a geographical focus on Africa, Central America and the Caribbean and Southeast Asia emerged. After Sida had adopted the Marine Initiative, the Department for Natural Resources and Environment obtained mandates from Sida’s Africa, Asia and Latin America Departments. These mandates were to elaborate program development and subsequent agreements. Program development was embarked upon and led to activities in prioritized issues and areas, on a scale appropriate to respective regional aspirations and economic situations.

“...financial and human resources from member countries [for regional organizations in developing countries] are often very limited”

During the preparations and dialogues with various institutions, various aspects were identified as critical for assessing the suggested activities and for the organizations supported. These aspects included:

- The specific importance of the marine environment and aquatic resources for the region in question, especially in regard to poverty alleviation, the overriding target for Sida support.
- “The climate” of regional cooperation, meaning the rate at which ownership is established among member countries, both formally and informally.
- The relevance of the agenda of each organization in terms of its remit and mandate.
- The possibilities of making concrete links with planned or ongoing ambitions to establish regional river commissions for shared water and related resources (links under ICARM, i.e., Integrated Coastal and River Management).

- Links and possible connections to other regional organizations and the need to adapt some type of ecosystem approach.
- The possibility of supporting developing countries to fulfil their commitments to implementing different international conventions, codes and agreements¹.

“The present approach will move away from a primary concern with marine pollution and embark on a path by which a balance between development and environment will be sought”

As mentioned above, after an early period of support that was primarily sector based, the present approach will move away from a primary concern with marine pollution and embark on a path by which a balance between development and environment will be sought with regards to development in marine and coastal areas. To be able to address various questions related to societal development in coastal areas, there is, for instance, a need to improve coastal planning. Regional environmental and resource management programs also need to cooperate with various sectors and representatives for regional and national interests such as line agencies, regional conventions, regional fisheries

bodies, as well as the private sector and civil society in general. Communication between regional organizations is also necessary in order to draw upon experiences of success.

Efforts to bring various regions on a par with global development and the implementation of international conventions and agreements is an important task. In this context, the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries is a central instrument in the management of aquatic resources and environmental protection. With global agreements as a source of reference, there is a need to strengthen regional cooperation and coordinated management in support of the capacity of coastal states to improve management of their fisheries resources.

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Coastal states and other parties involved in fishing are responsible for agreeing on sustainable management measures, even though actual implementation remains a national undertaking. It is these responsibilities that makes regional cooperation and the promotion of a national policy in harmony with regional and international agreements imperative. These



¹ In addition to the Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS), others include the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the Ramsar Convention, shipping related conventions such as MARPOL and OPRC, the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals, the Precautionary Principle, and the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing (CCRF).

responsibilities are often difficult to live up to and make the development of regionally coordinated management difficult. In general, support should be allocated to strengthening regional mechanisms through support to regional “secretariat functions” and to facilitating exchange of information, compilation of scientific information, organizing workshops and negotiations, and human resources development. This could include assistance in bringing information to wider audiences, including information on the status of available resources and the environment, fishing capacity, and the social and economic importance of small-scale and large-scale fisheries.

Sida agreements in four regions under the umbrella of the Marine Initiative

The geographical focus of the Marine Initiative refers to four distinctive regions. Following the preparatory phase, decisions on support have been taken and agreements either signed or prepared in all four regions. These have implied a set of agreements with FAO, for regional fisheries bodies, and with UNEP, for support to established regional seas programs, for Central America and the Caribbean, East Africa and West Africa regions.

In Southeast Asia and the ASEAN region, agreements were signed during 2003 with:

- The Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) for Human Resource Development on the Support of Implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries Management for the ASEAN Region;
- FAO and the FAO Regional Office for Asian and Pacific (FAO RAPI) for Strengthening the Capacity in Fisheries Information Gathering for Fisheries Management;
- The UNEP Coordinating Body for Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) for support to the implementation and development of the regional Action Plan.

Sida-SEAFDEC agreement for Human Resource Development

The support is targeted at ASEAN Member Countries, which are currently producing 11% of global fisheries products. For the past five years, the established ASEAN fisheries framework has been coordinated by SEAFDEC, and the special focus for both the region and national governments is on the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF).



During the Millennium Conference in November 2001, a capital landmark for the region, a Resolution and Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the Region was adopted by ASEAN's fisheries-related ministers. This is considered as a common regional fisheries policy for the region alongside the Code of Conduct. The commitment by governments, through the Resolution, to promote sustainable fisheries both in the region and in each of the countries levels facilitates the promotion and implementation of activities related to the Code of Conduct.

In the same spirit, SEAFDEC is implementing a program for the Regionalization of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (RCCRF) as one of the ASEAN- SEAFDEC collaborative programs. The program aims to formulate regional guidelines for the implementation of selected Articles of the Code of Conduct in order to accommodate regional priorities, needs and specificities. The existence of the Resolution and Plan of Action and the Guidelines (in effect, technical clarifications) related to the Code of Conduct has enhanced regional and national awareness about the Code of Conduct. Swedish support will be used to further promote the implementation of issues related to fisheries management in the RCCRF through appropriate human resource development activities.

“If the required actions to manage the fisheries as proposed in the Regional Guidelines to the Code of Conduct are not implemented, fisheries resources will further decline, and the aquatic environment will continue to deteriorate”

It is necessary to accommodate in the Code of Conduct specific regional features of fisheries in tropical and developing countries. Additional steps must also be taken to adjust or elaborate regional guidelines to the Code of Conduct so that it becomes useful as a practical framework for developing countries. The harmonization of fisheries management in developing countries, with both the protection of the aquatic environment and an effective implementation of the Code of Conduct, is of great importance. Actual

implementation is critical for the achievement of global sustainable fisheries and for support in attaining targets set at the WSSD in Johannesburg.

Fuelled by increasing domestic and international demand for fisheries products, the fisheries sector in developing countries, especially in Southeast Asian countries, has grown rapidly to become an important element of economic development. At the same time, it has been recognized that the status of fisheries resources has deteriorated through increased and unregulated fishing. If the required actions to manage the fisheries as proposed in the Regional Guidelines to the Code of Conduct are not implemented, fisheries resources will further decline, and the aquatic environment will continue to deteriorate. This deterioration will first affect those engaged in small-scale fisheries, who are the large majority of those engaged in the sector, and who presently are already suffering from declining catches and income, subsequent to the decreasing fisheries resources.

A drastic change in the course of action is needed. Effective implementation of the RCCRF could be instrumental in this process. It is a social and environmental necessity to mitigate the impact of fisheries on the aquatic environment and to improve the general poverty status of those involved in small-scale fisheries.

The broad objective of the Swedish support is to facilitate the national implementation of issues related to fisheries management in the CCRF through appropriate human resource development activities. These include in particular awareness building, training and capacity-building activities. More specifically, the support from Sida aims:

1. To enhance awareness of the necessity of appropriate fisheries management to achieving sustainable fisheries
2. To advise stakeholders on the mechanisms of innovative fisheries management systems
3. To promote various human resource development activities on fisheries management among identified target groups, and

4. To identify various options for alleviating the problems caused by the excessive levels of fishing capacity.

As both the Code of Conduct itself and the Regional Guidelines cover a wide range of issues, and as different types actions are required in achieving sustainable fisheries, activities and recommendations under specific programs need to be focused through identification of problem areas and related target group. Priority setting exercises are important in support of ASEAN Member Countries' promoting and implementing activities leading towards sustainable fisheries and alleviation of poverty. Such priority areas includes reduction of over capacity in fishing, approaches to regulating the current open access regime, and decentralized fisheries and environmental management.

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Through implementing activities, it is envisaged that the Sida support will contribute towards:

- Building a consensus among ASEAN Countries
- Implementing the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Collaborative Program, and
- Enhancing ownership and collaboration among ASEAN Member Countries.

About the author

Magnus Torell, a Swedish national, is employed with support from Sida, Sweden, as a Senior Advisor to SEAFDEC. Before joining SEAFDEC in 2003 he was for seven years with ICLARM (now the World Fish Centre). He came to ICLARM from Sida, in Stockholm, employed as a Senior Programme Officer for eight years. He hold two academic degrees, one in Law and one (PhD) in Economic Geography.

