

Boosting Responsible Fisheries Development in the ASEAN Region via the Japanese Trust Fund Program

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Starting 1998, SEAFDEC has been implementing projects in the ASEAN region with the assistance of the Trust Fund Program of the Fisheries Agency of the Government of Japan. Through such assistance, SEAFDEC has been able to pursue the implementation of projects aimed at addressing the various concerns and issues on responsible fisheries development for food security in the ASEAN countries.

The Government of Japan through its Japanese Trust Fund (JTF) Program has been assisting SEAFDEC to heighten the development of responsible fisheries in the ASEAN region since 1998. Japan's financial assistance channeled through the JTF Program, has enabled SEAFDEC to continue implementing regional projects with the view to promoting the development of sustainable fisheries.

The implementation of fisheries projects under the JTF Program has been supported by a series of regional directives. Specifically, the implementation of regional projects in the ASEAN countries found a new light after the adoption of the SEAFDEC Strategic Plan in 1998 and also after the establishment of the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Fisheries Consultative Group (FCG) collaborative mechanism in the same year. This has also been intensified after the adoption of the Resolution and the Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for the ASEAN Region in 2001, paving the way for the formulation of policies and strategies aimed at achieving sustainable fisheries and ensuring food security in the ASEAN region.

The program formulation strategy stipulated in the Resolution on the SEAFDEC Strategic Plan and Terms of Reference of the FCG have been used as basis by SEAFDEC in formulating regional programs more particularly the Regionalization of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (RCCRF). Furthermore, the Resolution and the Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for the ASEAN Region, which were developed following the guiding principles of the global CCRF, provided the framework and policy guidelines for SEAFDEC to promote the adoption of the CCRF in the ASEAN region. Thus, with financial support from the JTF Program, SEAFDEC continued to implement the RCCRF from 1998 to 2006 in order to consider certain specificities in the Southeast Asian fisheries structures as well as the region's cultural and socio-economic realities.

The JTF Program Implementation

Under the JTF Program, SEAFDEC has already implemented more than 45 wide-ranging activities in the ASEAN region from 1998 to 2007. The activities cover various areas in sustainable fisheries development, such as sustainable fisheries management, responsible marine fishing technologies, responsible and sustainable aquaculture, safe and wholesome fishery products, fisheries resources research, marine resources conservation, management and enhancement, etc. leading to the formulation of policies and development of technologies that have been disseminated and adopted in the region (**Box 1**).

Among the most significant achievements of SEAFDEC is the successful promotion of the CCRF in the ASEAN region. Through the RCCRF project, Regional Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries in Southeast Asia covering responsible fishing technology and practices,

Box 1. Advancements attained by SEAFDEC through the JTF Program

- Enhancement of the promotion of sustainable fisheries management in the region
- Improvement, verification and intensified dissemination of responsible coastal fishing technologies to the region
- Amplification of the development of responsible and sustainable aquaculture
- Augmentation of the promotion of safe and wholesome fishery products in the region
- Intensification of the conduct of fishery resources research
- Strengthening of the marine resources conservation, management and enhancement efforts
- Intensified utilization of harmonized information for fisheries management
- Establishment of forums for monitoring the region's common stand in responding to international fisheries related issues
- Intensified advocacy for the visibility and public awareness of SEAFDEC initiatives and efforts

aquaculture, post-harvest technology and trade, and fisheries management, were published and disseminated. The Regional Guidelines have been used by the ASEAN countries as frameworks for the promotion of responsible fisheries in their respective countries.

The sustained efforts of SEAFDEC in advancing the adoption of the Regional Guidelines in the ASEAN region have been globally recognized when SEAFDEC received in November 2007 the Margarita Lizárraga Medal Award for the biennium 2006-2007 from FAO, for having “served with distinction in the application of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries through the RCCRF”. This prestigious achievement is another milestone in the 40 years of SEAFDEC’s existence. Having assisted SEAFDEC in fostering responsible fisheries in the region through the RCCRF and in the dissemination of the Regional Guidelines, the JTF Program is committed to continue its support to SEAFDEC for the advancement of sustainable development of fisheries in the region.

Specifically, through the continuing efforts of SEAFDEC in promoting the adoption of the Regional Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries in the region, the ASEAN countries were also able to initiate activities and continue intensifying their efforts in implementing the CCRF. The countries also made use of the CCRF principles in revising and/or updating their national policies and legal documents such as fisheries laws as well as in their plans and programs on sustainable fisheries development. Thus, it could be assured that fisheries development in the region is harmonized with global initiatives as well as with the sustainable and responsible approaches. In order to further assess the progress of the ASEAN countries as well as identify their needs for the continued mainstreaming of the CCRF in their respective programs, the JTF Program also supported the conduct of the “Seminar on Implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries in Southeast Asia” in October 2007. During the Seminar, SEAFDEC was specifically requested to continue providing support to the ASEAN countries to enable them to pursue further implementation of the CCRF.

Since fisheries in the Southeast Asian region are mainly small-scale, the JTF Program also supports SEAFDEC in implementing projects aimed to strengthen the development and management of the region’s small-scale fisheries. By introducing innovative management measures such as rights-based and co-management approaches, a stable fish supply and food security could be ensured as such approaches highlight the importance of improving the small-scale fishers’ livelihood and their fishing communities. The innovative measures and approaches have been concretized in the Regional Guidelines for Co-

management Using Group User Rights for Small-Scale Fisheries in Southeast Asia produced by SEAFDEC in 2006. Since then, SEAFDEC has been assisting the ASEAN countries in strengthening their management strategies for coastal and inland fisheries through the promotion of rights-based and co-management in fisheries, management of overcapacity in coastal areas, etc. The ASEAN countries on the other hand, continued to promote the mainstreaming of the Regional Guidelines into their respective national policies on small-scale fisheries.

The high demand for fish and fishery products as well as the fast modernization of fishing technology, led to the over-exploitation of the coastal fishery resources in the region. This situation makes the small-scale fishers vulnerable to the competition for limited fishing grounds with decreasing resources. Recognizing such concern, SEAFDEC with support from the JTF Program has promoted responsible fishing technologies through the adoption of selective fishing gears and practices. In addition, to minimize the catch of juveniles and trash fishes by trawlers, SEAFDEC developed the Juvenile and Trash Fish Excluder Devices (JTEDs) and collaborated with the ASEAN countries for the on-site demonstrations on the use of JTEDs. Currently, a number of fishing fleets in many ASEAN countries have been installed with JTEDs as possible means of selectively harvesting only the target fish species. Moreover, SEAFDEC also promoted set-net fisheries as a means of reducing the fishing pressure on coastal fisheries resources. Initially implemented in Thailand, the set-net fisheries technology has been disseminated to the ASEAN region through training and information dissemination.

Considering the potentials of aquaculture to fill the gap between supply and demand for fish and fishery products, the JTF Program has always been behind SEAFDEC in promoting aquaculture as a long-term strategy



Experiment and demonstration on the use of TEDs in Thai waters



for economic development by making aquaculture development technically feasible, economically viable, environment-friendly, and socially equitable. Since aquatic diseases have also threatened the region's sustainable aquaculture development, the JTF Program also backs SEAFDEC in facilitating the healthy and wholesome trading of aquaculture products from the region through the development of diagnostic methods of important viral diseases of aquatic animals as well as the establishment of disease surveillance system of aquatic diseases. SEAFDEC's continued efforts in promoting fish disease management in the region has prompted the countries to continue their endeavors in controlling aquatic diseases to safeguard the quality of their products which are meant not only for domestic consumption but also for the foreign markets to attain economic sufficiency.

With the full support of the JTF Program, SEAFDEC has also advanced the production of safe and wholesome fishery products by maximizing the utilization of fish catch and minimizing wastage of fish resources. The application of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP), Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), and Standard Sanitation Operating Procedures (SSOPs), etc. has been promoted to ensure food safety and help the region's fish processing industries in meeting quality assurance requirements. Enhancing the understanding of all stakeholders on the

implications of chemical contaminants and drug residues in fish and fish products has also been continued. With the development of capacities to detect residues in fish and fish products, countries in the region are now able to take appropriate actions to manage the safety and quality of their fish and fish products for domestic consumption as well as for export.

The conservation of the marine turtles in the region has also been advanced by SEAFDEC through the JTF Program. This has been carried out through sustainable hatchery management, tagging experiments considering that sea turtles are highly migratory species, stock enhancement, mitigating the interaction between sea turtles and fisheries, and promoting the adoption of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) to minimize sea turtle by-catch from trawl fisheries.

In consonance with the 1998 SEAFDEC Strategic Plan on Fisheries, the projects and activities conducted by SEAFDEC with support from the JTF Program are aimed to effectively safeguard the interests and welfare of the countries in the region from unfair treatment in order not to jeopardize the sustainability of the region's fisheries. SEAFDEC therefore continues to provide the platform for discussing and exchanging views on emerging issues related to fisheries that have serious implications to the

region's trading of fish and fishery products including the sustainability of the region's fishery resources. This has enabled the countries in the region to respond to various international initiatives and requirements related to fish trade and to develop common stand and policy options on such emerging issues.

Promotion of JTF Program Achievements

Promoting and transferring the technologies developed from the various JTF program activities to the ASEAN region has been sustained by SEAFDEC through intensified training and human resource development as well as through massive information dissemination. Regional workshops, training sessions, meetings, and conferences on relevant topics were regularly convened to transfer the technologies developed through the regional projects, gather feedback from the ASEAN countries on the adoption of the developed technologies as well as to secure the plans for the future programs of work and activities. Proceedings and reports of meetings and surveys have been published and disseminated to the region, while some technical reports emanating from the projects and activities have found their ways into various scientific journals and other publications, confirming the validity and applicability of the developed technologies.

Moreover, the many important findings and policies that have impacts on the development of sustainable fisheries in the region have been summarized in the publication "Celebrating Ten Years of Sustainable Fisheries Development in the ASEAN via the Japanese Trust Fund Program: JTF Achievement in SEAFDEC", which was published and launched in April 2008. The publication has been disseminated to its target clientele specifically to the peoples of Japan and the ASEAN region, to make them aware of the achievements attained from the regional activities that have been implemented by SEAFDEC with financial support from the JTF Program. This is also intended to increase the understanding of the peoples' from the ASEAN region on the need to properly manage fisheries for their own benefit and most of all for the benefit of the small-scale fishers in Southeast Asia.

The Special Publication Fish for the People has also played a vital role in enhancing public awareness on various regional activities and outcomes from the SEAFDEC programs and the implementation of the regional sustainable fisheries policies. With full support from the JTF Program, the initiatives of the SEAFDEC Member Countries in addressing various concerns on sustainable fisheries development with respect to the Resolution and the Plan of Action are also being promoted through the

Box 2. JTF Projects (2008-2012)

- Research and Stock Enhancement on Shared Stocks
- Exploration of New Resources and Fishing Grounds
- Effective Utilization of Under-utilized Resources
- Improvement of Post-harvest Practices
- Collection of Information and Public Relations about International Fisheries Issues

Special Publication thus, providing an opportunity for the issues relating to the practical improvement of the current status of local fisheries to be brought forward, attracting the attention and consideration of potential target groups. Moreover, with Fish for the People promoting the visibility of SEAFDEC as an important regional fisheries body, it could also evolve into a regional structure for the exchange of fisheries-related information in Southeast Asia.

Plan of Action

Beyond 2007, the JTF Program has committed to continue leading SEAFDEC towards the sustainable development of fisheries in the ASEAN region. As part of such continued commitment, the JTF Program in SEAFDEC convened a meeting in Bangkok, Thailand in June 2007 to deepen the understanding of the SEAFDEC Member Countries and the Departments on the JTF Policy as well as to seek inputs from the Member Countries for the programming of future projects and activities under the JTF Program. Thus, in addition to the continuing projects from 2007, a number of new projects (**Box 2**) would also be carried out by SEAFDEC with continued support from the JTF Program.

In brief, as the implementation of the activities pursued by SEAFDEC proceeds from 2008, the JTF Program envisaged that SEAFDEC would continue to foster the mainstreaming of the policies and findings that emanate from the regional activities by the countries in the region for the sustainable development of fisheries.

About the Author

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