

Advancing the Promotion of FOVOP in the ASEAN Region: *Issues and Challenges for Future Cooperation*

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This Policy Brief which was developed during the Second Regional Technical Consultation on the Promotion of “One Village, One Fisheries Product (FOVOP)” in the ASEAN Region held in Chiang Mai, Thailand on 22-26 March 2010, is intended to be used as reference for relevant planning and policy development in the fisheries sector of the ASEAN countries. As envisaged, this Policy Brief is also intended to strengthen the capability of SEAFDEC in promoting the need for improved livelihood in the fishing communities and for the sustainable development of the fishing industry in the ASEAN region.

Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) form the backbone of the economy in the ASEAN countries, and are the largest source of the people’s livelihoods and domestic employment across all economic sectors including fisheries. Through the MSMEs, the women and youth could be provided with opportunities to participate in the economic development activities of the countries in order to contribute to the improvement of the region’s economies. Considering that a robust, dynamic and efficient MSME could ensure sustainable social and economic development, the promotion of competitive and innovative MSMEs is critical in boosting greater economic growth of the ASEAN region.

The over-exploitation and decline of aquatic resources coupled with the lack of alternative and/or supplementary livelihoods in the fishing communities have constrained the sustainable development of fisheries in the ASEAN region, trapping the fishing communities in the never-ending cycle of rural poverty. Many countries have exerted efforts in exploring ways and approaches to minimize further deterioration of the economic conditions of their respective fishing communities. Activating and improving rural economy with the view of improving the fishers’ livelihoods, alleviating poverty and contributing to the overall sustainable socio-economic development, had been the most common approach pursued by the countries. However, the fisheries MSME sector, particularly the subsistent and marginal as well as the self-sufficient and small surplus sub-sectors, is being confronted with wide-ranging issues and challenges. These include the limited access to technology, micro-credit and local financial services as well as to domestic markets. The insufficient entrepreneurial spirit and managerial skills, compounded by the scarcity of information, restrained

compliance to standards and certification, and the absence of an environment conducive to various business ventures, have also complicated the situation of the fishers. Such scenario continues to ensnare the fishing communities in the rural poverty cycle with almost no possible way of getting out.

The ASEAN Member Countries in collaboration with SEAFDEC and the ASEAN Secretariat with funding support from the ASEAN Foundation through the Japan-ASEAN Solidarity Fund, had initiated and implemented the Project on the Promotion of “One Village, One Fisheries Product (FOVOP)” System to Improve the Livelihood of the Fisheries Communities in the ASEAN Region (2007-2010). The 30-month Project introduced and adapted the “One Village, One Product (OVOP)” concept which originated from Oita Prefecture in Japan, under the context of the ASEAN region’s fisheries scenario (Wongsanga and Sulit, 2010). Through the experiences and lessons learnt from the Project as well as other on-going OVOP-like initiatives in the ASEAN region, FOVOP has been identified as a potential approach which could contribute to the region’s efforts in providing alternative and supplementary livelihoods to fishers and their communities through enhanced rural economy and abated poverty (Kato, 2006). Thus through FOVOP, the fishers and their communities would be empowered in order to be actively engaged in long-term fisheries development and management processes. Moreover, the cooperation of the key supporting agencies is crucial in further promoting the FOVOP approach in the ASEAN region.



Promotion of FOVOP in the ASEAN Region

The results of the case studies which were conducted from April 2009 until January 2010 under the FOVOP Project included the confirmed localized and unique potential products as well as the potential post-project activities as means that could provide alternative and supplementary livelihoods to fishing communities. In addition, the issue on gender and development had been embedded in the various Project activities. All these factors had facilitated the development of the regional guidelines for the promotion of FOVOP in the ASEAN (SEAFDEC, 2010), **Box 1**.

Contribution of FOVOP to Sustainable Fisheries and Rural Economy

As envisaged, the approach developed by SEAFDEC under the FOVOP Project could be used by government agencies in providing the enabling support for the rural fishing communities in adopting ways and means to address sustainable fisheries development, thereby alleviating poverty in the process. With the FOVOP initiative focusing on the small-scale fishers, promoting such initiatives could be conducted through: (1) the implementation of FOVOP

as part of national packages of sustainable fisheries management and poverty alleviation programs; (2) the promotion of FOVOP based on the Regional Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries in the Southeast Asian Region; and (3) the promotion of habitats, biodiversity, and environmental conservation, specifically through the following six approaches:

Policy Framework and Enabling Support

An appropriate national policy framework for the promotion of FOVOP is necessary as an important initial step towards the successful adoption of the FOVOP initiative. Such policy framework should be formulated and strengthened as part of the national poverty alleviation policy and programs as well as that of national fisheries development framework. The responsible institutions to be involved and the delegation of the functions and responsibilities from the national to local levels should also be clarified under the respective national policy framework.

Moreover, the target beneficiaries for the promotion of FOVOP should also be specified. While noting that most ASEAN countries have in place national policies and

Box 1: The Regional Guidelines for the Promotion of FOVOP in the ASEAN Region

The Regional Guidelines for the Promotion of FOVOP in the ASEAN Region has the overall objective of providing a common framework for the countries in the region in promoting the FOVOP approach and subsequently promoting cooperation between SEAFDEC and the ASEAN countries. In addition, the Regional Guidelines could also be used by concerned government agencies in providing the enabling support for the rural people to adopt the FOVOP approach in their respective communities.

Structure, Purpose and Potential Usage of the Regional Guidelines

The Regional Guidelines is also envisaged to substantiate the national efforts of addressing the issues related to poverty alleviation and food security. Relevant provisions in the Regional Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries in Southeast Asia: Responsible Fisheries Management; and Responsible Post-harvest Practices and Trade, have also been elaborated on, given focus and form part in the corresponding sub-articles of the FOVOP Regional Guidelines.



The Guidelines consist of 12 sections:

- I. Objectives
- II. Target Beneficiaries
- III. General Principles
- IV. Policy and Institutional Framework
- V. Prioritization of the FOVOP Communities and their Products and Services
- VI. Institutional Building and Group Organization
- VII. Products and Services Development and Improvement
- VIII. Credit and Financial Services and Facilities
- IX. Marketing Development and Products and Services Promotion
- X. Human Resources and Entrepreneurial Capacity Development
- XI. Collaboration among ASEAN Countries and Regional/International Organizations
- XII. Follow-up Actions to Promote the Implementation of the Regional Guidelines

Based on the outcomes of the pilot processes in the ASEAN Countries, it could be gleaned that the readiness and enabling environment of the countries in the region to facilitate the creation, development and promotion of FOVOP, varied to certain extent. These have been specifically observed in the available relevant government policies, administrative structures, existing institutions and available human resources, technical and financial support, among others. However, considering the nature of the Regional Guidelines that contain generalized issues in broader contexts rather than on specific national situation, in the actual application of the Guidelines, appropriate adjustments could be made as deemed necessary in order to fit into the national or local specifics in terms of geo-political, social, economic and legal situations.

programs supporting MSME development including those in the fisheries sector, the target beneficiaries should be the small-scale fishers specifically from the fishing households and family units pursuing various economic activities. Promotion of the FOVOP initiative should therefore be anchored on such target beneficiaries to ensure that their interests and commitments as well as sense of ownership are directed while the policy and enabling support provided by the government is enhanced through the consultative processes.

Since enabling policy support is essential to foster the implementation of any FOVOP initiative, such policy support could include the integration of FOVOP into the value-chain and market systems, micro-credit and financial services, regulatory and control on product/service standards and certifications, education and capacity building on various aspects that are relevant to the FOVOP implementation, and public investment in products/services research and development. Inter-agency coordination among the fisheries line agencies and agencies working in support of rural development and poverty alleviation at various levels should also be established and/or enhanced and promoted.

Institutional Building with Emphasis on Women's Groups and the Youth

Institutional set-up of fishers' groups or organizations is an important social process of the FOVOP initiative, where women's groups and the youth should be encouraged to take part in the process. Local mechanisms to strengthen the capability of the institutions in sustaining the FOVOP initiative should also be ensured. Regular conduct of capacity building activities, including visits and exchange programs on various aspects such as technology development and innovations, management skills as well as basic accounting and bookkeeping, among others, could certainly help in the promotion of FOVOP.

Product Development and Improvement with Emphasis on Value-added Products/Services

FOVOP works well when the products/services are identified and prioritized based on uniqueness, comparative advantages of the communities as well as products/services marketability. Consideration should be made on the sources and supply of raw materials, marketability of products/services as well as on product quality and safety standards and assurance, packaging and labeling. The need to develop the national guidelines and supporting systems could aptly support these requirements.

Credit and Financial Services and Facilities

As the development and implementation of FOVOP requires certain amount of capital and investment costs, the possibility of establishing micro-credit and financial services and facilities should be explored. These could include among others the establishment of community or group savings to serve as accessible source of investments and also as source of counterpart funds or as form of collateral for soft loans with commercial banks or as counterpart funds for grants or financial assistance from governments, non-government and international organizations, co-funding source among the existing groups, organizations or associations to strengthen the financial status and position of the communities in order to be able to obtain as groups, grants such as soft loans and other forms of financial assistance.

Marketing Development and Products/Services Promotion

A system of marketing and distributing the products/services should be built-in the FOVOP initiative to support easy access to domestic markets and local value-chain. Market support systems could be linked to the existing national MSME marketing campaigns. Finally, capacity building for fishers and fishers' institutions should be conducted to enable them gain access to the markets.

Human Resources and Entrepreneurial Capacity Development

Capacity building for the target beneficiaries should be established to support the FOVOP initiative. Such development activities should, among others, include products/services development, management skills for FOVOP development, rural leadership, which could be carried out through training, exchanging of experiences and networking.

Way Forward for Future Cooperation

The Regional Guidelines on the Promotion of FOVOP in the ASEAN Region (SEAFDEC, 2010) could be used as regional reference in the national implementation of the FOVOP initiative as well as in planning for regional supporting programs. In order to promote the adoption of the FOVOP approach in the ASEAN region, the ASEAN member countries should investigate the applicability of the Regional Guidelines and be responsible for the implementation of the Regional Guidelines. Where appropriate, the ASEAN countries could make the necessary adjustments in the Regional Guidelines that fit the nature and requirements as well as the locality and specificity of their respective countries. In summary, the promotion

of “One Village, One Fisheries Product (FOVOP)” in the ASEAN Region could be undertaken through the following strategies:

1. Raising awareness and understanding on the FOVOP initiative on the part of the policy-makers of the ASEAN (*i.e.* the ASEAN Sectoral Working Groups – Fisheries, Agricultural Cooperatives, MSMEs Development) and the SEAFDEC Council to obtain their support and ensure that the ASEAN countries implement the Regional Guidelines in their respective localities, and promote the adoption of the FOVOP approach in the region;
2. Mainstreaming the FOVOP initiative into the regional policy and cooperation framework. Regional cooperation among the ASEAN countries and international/regional organizations could foster the future development of the FOVOP initiatives in the region. Specifically, mainstreaming FOVOP as an approach supporting development and integration of the fisheries sector as part of the ASEAN Community building process could be considered; and
3. Formulating the regional supporting program similar to the FOVOP movement for future promotion and implementation could be facilitated with possible support from the ASEAN and its dialogue partners.

Proposed Inputs for the ASEAN-SEAFDEC “Fish for the People 2020” Conference

Considering that the ASEAN and SEAFDEC would organize the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Conference on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security Towards 2020: “Fish for the People 2020” in June 2011, and since the issue and concern on poverty alleviation would be discussed during the said Conference, it is therefore proposed that the FOVOP approach be included in the new decade Resolution and Plan of Action that would be adopted during the Conference (**Box 2**).

Supporting References

- ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint (A6. Priority Integration Sectors, A7. Food, Agriculture and Forestry, and C1. SME Development)
- ASEAN Policy Blueprint for SME Development (APBSD) (2004-2014)
- ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SME Development (2010-2015)
- ASEAN Strategic Plan of Action for Food, Agriculture and Forestry (2006-2010)
- Pouchamarn Wongsanga and Virgilia T. Sulit. 2010. One Village, One Fisheries Product – for Food Security and Poverty Alleviation. *In: Fish for the People*, Vol. 8 No. 1 (2010). Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, Bangkok, Thailand; pp. 4-7

Box 2: Proposed Inputs for the “Fish for the People 2020” Conference in June 2011

Inputs for the Resolution

- “Providing alternative/supplementary livelihoods to fishers and their communities through enhanced rural economy, alleviating poverty, and empowering fishers to be actively engaged in long-term fisheries development and management processes by mobilizing the “One Village, One Fisheries Product (FOVOP) approach”.

Inputs for the Plan of Action

- Mainstreaming FOVOP initiative into national poverty alleviation program
- Mainstreaming FOVOP initiative into national fisheries policy and strategy for implementation in the ASEAN Countries
- Mainstreaming FOVOP initiative into regional policy and cooperation framework
- Developing Regional Support Program to support the promotion of FOVOP in the ASEAN Region.

Inputs for the Regional Program Supporting the Implementation of the New Resolution and Plan of Action

The following are the priority areas of activity necessary to support the implementation of the new Resolution and Plan of Action:

- Awareness and capacity building, and networking with relevant stakeholders and target beneficiaries within and among countries as well as between countries and international/regional organizations by exploring the establishment of sharing mechanisms in terms of expertise, experience and lessons learned to ensure the success in the promotion and implementation of FOVOP in the ASEAN Region.
- Monitoring the progress of the FOVOP promotion and implementation in respective ASEAN countries through coordination and collaboration among the networking partners at national and regional levels.
- Facilitating the development of Supplementary Guidelines on specific areas/issues that require substantive direction and guidance for the promotion and implementation of FOVOP in the ASEAN Region.

SEAFDEC. 2010. Regional Guidelines for the Promotion of “One Village, One Fisheries Product (FOVOP)” in the ASEAN Region. Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, Bangkok, Thailand; 31 p

Yasuhisa Kato. 2006. One Village, One Fisheries Product (FOVOP): Seeking “Only One, not Number One”. *In: Fish for the People*, Vol. 4 No. 2 (2006). Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, Bangkok, Thailand; pp. 2-7

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