

Improving Fisheries Management in Southeast Asia in Support of the Sustainable Development Goals

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Since the *United Nations Conference on the Human Environment* in Stockholm, Sweden on 5-16 June 1972, voices are increasingly raised on the need for concerted efforts to be put in place and implemented to ensure sustainable development by *balancing availability of resources with the level of harvesting*, and in the process *ensuring that methods used are not damaging to nature* - and that the *benefits are shared equitably to reduce poverty and improve human well-being*. The global dialogue initiated in Stockholm has continued since then and the ambitions and commitments of governments and independent actors had been defined and as needed reinforced, during major events like the *UN Conference on Environment and Development* (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. That Conference succeeded in building consensus on actions needed and specifically, guidance was stipulated in its “*Agenda 21*” that provides directions with regards to marine and coastal resources. Ten years after UNCED in Rio another milestone event, the *World Summit on Sustainable Development* (WSSD) was organized in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002. In addition to state leaders, participants included private sector, NGO and CSO representations. A short-coming though was the limited representation from the US Government. If the meeting in Johannesburg, due to lack of commitment from countries like the USA, had its limitations, further advances was made another ten years later when the *United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development* (Rio+20) was held for the second time in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012. The Rio+20 Conference was instrumental in initiating the process of developing what would become the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. After a consultative process over three years, the SDGs were finally adopted on 25 September 2015 by the 193 UN Member States at the UN General Assembly in New York. On that occasion, then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated that: “*The new agenda is a promise by leaders to all people, everywhere. It is a universal, integrated and transformative vision for a better world*”.

The goals and targets are in many ways reflections of many parallel processes that since the Stockholm Conference and earlier fora, are working on developing globally recognized agreements and conventions covering a very broad range of sectors and social dimensions. With special focus on marine and coastal concerns, the *1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)* at its adoption provides broad and far-reaching binding framework for responsibilities and obligations with regards to marine and coastal areas within and outside of the economic zones of coastal states – and “life below water” which is SDG 14.



Adapted from United Nations (2015)

Far-reaching global targets in support of collective efforts to secure long-term sustainability in fisheries and aquatic resources management is also provided through the *Aichi Targets* that recognized the vital importance to maintain and conserve the aquatic resources through well-managed fisheries (CBD, 2010). The *Aichi Targets* were developed through a consultative process and adopted by the parties to the Convention of Biodiversity (CBD) during the 10th Conference of the Parties to the CBD held in Nagoya, Japan in 2010. At the CBD Conference, the parties to the CBD Convention supported a new Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. The Plan consists of 20 targets that are called the *Aichi Targets* and specifically, Target Number 6 provides a very ambitious target with regards to the management of fisheries.

The list of relevant and important international agreements with regards to fisheries is very long but the development and adoption of the *FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (1995)* are of special significance and have provided guidance throughout the world on efforts to ensure socially and environmentally sustainable fisheries. The significance of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) was also recognized by SEAFDEC and the ASEAN Member States

The Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 supporting targets (United Nations, 2015) are both multi-focused and multi-dimensional covering the major aspects to be addressed in reaching the targets of sustainability – ranging from poverty alleviation and food security, “life below water” and “life on land” including freshwater systems and climate action, to decent work, gender equality, peace, justice and partnerships for achieving the goals. The SDGs are documented in Paragraph 54 of the United Nations Resolution A/RES/70/1 of 25 September 2015 (United Nations, 2015).

(AMSs). A consultative process was initiated by SEAFDEC to look at the CCRF in an ASEAN perspective that culminated with the *ASEAN-SEAFDEC Conference on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security in the New Millennium “Fish for the People,”* in 2001 in Bangkok, Thailand and the subsequent adoption of the *Resolution and Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region* (SEAFDEC, 2001) that has served as framework for the Southeast Asian countries in formulating programs and activities on sustainable fisheries for food security. This was followed by the development of a set of Regional Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries from 2003 and onwards, where the volume on “Responsible Fisheries Management” was more of an explanation of the CCRF in a Southeast Asian context rather than “guidelines” as such (SEAFDEC, 2003).

Ten years after the 2001 Conference, the ASEAN-SEAFDEC member countries felt it was time to revisit the Resolution and Plan of Action in order to confirm and/or redefine priorities and commitments. In response to the request from countries and regional collaborating agencies, the *ASEAN-SEAFDEC Conference on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region Towards 2020: “Fish for the People 2020: Adaptation to a Changing Environment”* was convened by SEAFDEC in June 2011 in Bangkok, Thailand (SEAFDEC, 2011a). In conjunction with the Conference, the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Ministers and Senior Officials adopted the *“Resolution and Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region towards 2020”* (SEAFDEC, 2011b). Therefore, the ambitions among the AMSs to strengthen regional unity through the ASEAN Community building is, as expressed in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint and the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint, in conformity with the SDGs and supportive of achieving the expressed targets.

Moves in the ASEAN Region in Support of the SDGs and Targets

As shown in the introduction and references above, many agreements and actions being implemented in the ASEAN region are, without explicitly stating it, supporting to global ambitions to achieve the SDGs and to reach the Aichi Targets. However, this paper only points at selected SDGs and SDG targets that are of relevance to the regional efforts of managing

fisheries sustainably with due consideration being given to social (gender) aspect, poverty alleviation and food security.

Sustainable Development Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture



SDG 2, Target 3: *By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment*

The targets set out in **Goal 2** are also basic to the ambitions of the ASEAN Community building as expressed in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint and the ASEAN Charter. In the “ASEAN-SEAFDEC Resolution and Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region Towards 2020” (ASEAN-SEAFDEC Resolution 2020), sustainable fisheries as a necessity to ensure food security is the very essence of the Resolution and subsequent implementation of activities in the region should have this perspective (SEAFDEC, 2011b).

Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources

Goal 14 is the main goal in terms of calling upon states and individuals to responsibly manage and use available marine resources and to combat illegal and destructive fishing practices. The aim to work together for the sustainability of fisheries is central to the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Resolution 2020 and the need to combat illegal fishing practices was highlighted during an ASEAN-SEAFDEC High-level Consultation in Bangkok 2016 (SEAFDEC, 2016a).



SDG 14, Target 2: *By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans*

SDG 14, Target 4: *By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics*



Efforts to strengthen cooperation, as well as manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems in the ASEAN region and in target sub-regions, e.g. Gulf of Thailand, Andaman Sea and the Sulu-Sulawesi Seas, are the essence in many programs and projects being implemented in the Southeast Asian region over the last decades. These include the UNEP/GEF South China Sea Project, SEAFDEC-Sweden Project, FAO-Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) Project, and the Coral Triangle Initiative – for Corals, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF).

Specifically, finding solutions and mobilizing joint action to combat illegal fishing and to strengthen regulatory measures while improving recording systems of catches and landings that allows for traceability, such as through the ASEAN Catch Documentation Scheme, is top of the Agenda in the ASEAN region. This is under-pinned by struggles of exporting countries to maintain global market access and to remove the threats of “yellow” and “red” cards. SEAFDEC is leading several regional and sub-regional initiatives that aim to combat illegal fishing and improve regulatory measures in cooperation with the ASEAN, FAO, Regional Plan of Action to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices including Combating IUU Fishing in the Region (RPOA-IUU), CTI-CFF, US, Australia and Sweden, among others.



SDG 14, Target 5: *By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information*

SDG 14, Target 7: *By 2030, increase the economic benefits to Small Island Developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism*

Over the last couple of decades the capacity among the AMSs to conserve and designate special areas for conservation and rehabilitation, has increased significantly with the establishment of special government agencies (e.g. Ministries of Natural Resources and Environment) that in cooperation with other stakeholders, monitor the status of marine and coastal areas. At the regional and sub-regional levels, significant contributions have been made through projects like the UNEP/GEF Project on “Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand.”

With an added fisheries focus to the integration of fisheries and habitat management, the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project has, together with participating countries, supported the facilitation of regional and bilateral cooperation in the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea. In the Andaman Sea, valuable contributions have also been made by the FAO-BOBLME Project.

Although **Target 7** addresses the special needs of Small Island Developing States and their special need, a similar approach is being undertaken by SEAFDEC and collaborating agencies with regards to the lesser developed countries of the ASEAN (i.e. Cambodia, Myanmar and Lao PDR – and Timor-Leste) by providing extra attention in terms of capacity-building and in strengthening the ability to sustainably use marine and freshwater resources.



SDG 14, Target 9: *Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets*

SDG 14, Target 10: *Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in UNCLOS, which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, as recalled in paragraph 158 of ‘The Future We Want’*

To strengthen the capacity and resilience of smaller-scale fishing communities, including access to resources and markets, is the key objective of a multitude of projects being implemented in each of the ASEAN-SEAFDEC member country. Strengthening the rights and opportunities for smaller-scale fisher-folk and other communities, is also emphasized in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint.

At the regional level and upon adoption in 2014 of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines), finding suitable approaches to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines were called for (FAO, 2015). Thus, a number of important events calling upon government agencies, NGOs, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), had been held notably in Bali, Indonesia in 2015 and in Bangkok, Thailand in 2016. Although the main support to small-scale fisheries is to be made at national level, a broader context of the importance of small-scale fisheries will continue to be addressed at the regional and sub-regional levels (SEAFDEC, 2016b).

Moreover, SEAFDEC in cooperation with agencies such as FAO, RPOA-IUU, International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and others is regularly reviewing the international instruments and conventions with a view to assess and provide information to the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Member Countries on their implications to the fisheries sector in the region and to people dependent on the fishery resources. To allow for the uptake of relevant parts of international agreements, regional expert meetings and consultations have been organized by SEAFDEC where reference is made to the CCRF, FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA), Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES),

International Maritime Organization (IMO) Conventions, ILO Conventions, SFF Guidelines, UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), International Plan of Action for the Management of Fishing Capacity (IPOA-Capacity), and so on.

Furthermore, responses to SDG 14 are being reinforced by global and regional efforts made to reach **Aichi Strategic Goal B: Reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use (Box 1)**.

Box 1. Aichi Target Number 6

“By 2020, all fish and invertebrate stocks and aquatic plants are managed and harvested sustainably, legally and applying ecosystem based approaches, so that overfishing is avoided, recovery plans and measures are in place for all depleted species, fisheries have no significant adverse impacts on threatened species and vulnerable ecosystems and the impacts of fisheries on stocks, species and ecosystems are within safe ecological limits.

Sustainable Development Goal 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all

In terms of inland fisheries, the SDGs are less direct than in the case of “life below water” (SDG14). However, SDG 6 and SDG 15 (“life on land”) provide some directives and targets to aim for. In the Southeast Asian region, inland fisheries are of vital importance to millions of people, and the Mekong and Irrawaddy Rivers are among the most productive freshwater systems of the world.



SDG 6, Target 5: *By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate*

SDG 6, Target 6: *By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes*

SDG 6, Target 8: *Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management*

The Southeast Asian region features many transboundary waterbodies with the most important being the Mekong River. Cooperation among riparian states has been promoted over the last fifty years and since 1995 through the **Mekong River Commission (MRC)** based on the **1995 Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin**.

Through the MRC, integrated water resources management is promoted and since over twenty years, and the MRC Fisheries Programme has been estimating that the fish catches from the Mekong River could easily add up to 3 to 4 million metric tons annually. MRC, SEAFDEC, WorldFish Center, International

Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and others are actively engaged in supporting the sustainability of fisheries in the Mekong River and other inland water bodies, including through the newly established SEAFDEC Inland Fishery Resources Development and Management Department (SEAFDEC/IFRDMD). Trans-boundary cooperation on fisheries and habitat management are also being promoted in border areas between Cambodia and Lao PDR, Cambodia and Thailand, and Cambodia and Viet Nam.

Much of the work referred to above in support of **Target 5**, are to a large degree incorporating the efforts to maintain and restore important ecosystems and habitats as well as to ensure that inter-connectivity is maintained to allow fish to migrate to and from spawning areas. The monsoon-based seasonal variations with distinct wet and dry seasons require protection of the dry season refuge areas (where fish can reside during the dry season). In response to this concern, major efforts are undertaken to define and manage the Mekong deep pools and flood plain dry season ponds as well as other refuge areas. These activities are promoted by MRC, SEAFDEC, WorldFish Center, IUCN, WWF as well as national agencies.

At national levels, several national agencies, local CSOs and local NGOs are together with the MRC, SEAFDEC, WorldFish Center, IUCN and WWF, contributing to strengthening of the capacity of local communities while at the same time enhancing their participation in planning, decision-making and implementation of fisheries and supportive livelihood activities. In countries like Cambodia, Lao PDR and Thailand, special laws and sub-decrees are developed that create opportunities for inland and coastal communities to establish community fisheries. SEAFDEC, FAO, and partner organizations, together with countries and CSOs in the region, are exploring the options to support the SSF Guidelines.

Sustainable Development Goal 15: Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss

Much of what was mentioned with reference to SDG 6 is also relevant to actions taken in the region with regards to SDG 15 and related targets.



SDG 15, Target 1: *By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements*

SDG 15, Target 5: *Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species*

SDG 15, Target 8: *By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species*

In measures taken and activities implemented for the sustainable use of inland fishery resources, it is recognized that the health and connectivity of freshwater ecosystems need to be maintained. The importance of the freshwater ecosystems has been highlighted by the MRC Fisheries and Environment Programme, WorldFish Center, IUCN, WWF and others. SEAFDEC has also provided capacity-building on ecosystems approach to fisheries management for Lao PDR and (inland) Cambodia. Many national initiatives throughout the region including the establishment of protected areas, are contributing to the conservation of freshwater ecosystems in ways that also benefit the conservation of fish and aquatic resources.

Major measures are taken to reduce degradation of natural habitats and to halt the loss of biodiversity. With regards to inland fisheries this is linked to the need to preserve the health and connectivity of freshwater ecosystems and to protect dry season refuge areas. Special efforts are being made to prevent the extinction of threatened species such as the Mekong giant catfish (*Pangasianodon gigas*) and Mekong-Irrawaddy River dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*), among others. The potential threats being posed to aquatic ecosystems by the impacts of invasive alien species is now well recognized throughout the Southeast Asian region.

Regional Guidelines have been developed and are implemented. Good Aquaculture Practice programs and recommendations on stock enhancement include strict restriction against introduction of alien species. Almost all countries in the region have rules and regulation with restrictions on the introduction of alien species.

Responses to SDG 6 and 15 are being reinforced by global and regional efforts made to reach **Aichi Strategic Goal D: Enhance the benefits to all from biodiversity and Ecosystems Services (Box 2).**

Box 2. Aichi Target Number 14

By 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities, and the poor and vulnerable.

Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls



SDG 5, Target 7: *Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial*

services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

The importance to build upon and promote gender equality by giving all members of the society equal rights and – as far as possible – equal opportunities is increasingly recognized in the Southeast Asian region. Many of the ASEAN countries, such as the Philippines and ASEAN as a whole, have gender strategies and policies in place. With specific reference to fisheries and the designated fisheries agencies, there already exist gender strategies, such as in the case of Cambodia. At the regional level, the ASEAN as earlier mentioned had spearheaded gender integration, and with regards to inland fisheries the Fisheries Programme of MRC had established a fisheries gender network some ten years ago. Other organizations including SEAFDEC, is increasingly mainstreaming gender issues in their programs and projects. In fact, SEAFDEC had already designated its gender focal point in 2015. Coordination is encouraged, and IUCN/WWF, SEAFDEC and the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) Asia, among others, are in the process of undergoing comprehensive reviews of gender in fisheries and habitat management, as well as gender roles and functions in coastal communities. In addition SEAFDEC, through the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project, is promoting that all contracts for local capacity-building and community development should have gender aspects clearly integrated.

Sustainable Development Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

The efforts to seek reliable employment and decent work for all, have over the past decade been gaining increased attention also within the fisheries sector. During the Forty-eighth Meeting of the SEAFDEC Council in April 2016, the Council encouraged SEAFDEC to give more attention to labor issues and working conditions within the fishing industry. Some AMSs, such as Thailand, are on their way to accede to the ILO Convention 188 on Work in Fishing (SEAFDEC, 2016c).



SDG 8, Target 5: *Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms*

SDG 8, Target 6: *Protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment*

Target 5 and Target 6 are interlinked and frameworks to develop good labor practices (GLP) addresses both on the need for safe and secure working environments as well as

eradicating forced labor, human trafficking and child labor. In response to the request from the SEAFDEC Council and Member Countries, SEAFDEC organized the First Regional Technical Consultation on Labor Aspects within the Fishing Industry in the ASEAN Region in 2016 (SEAFDEC, 2016c).

The Consultation highlighted on the importance of ASEAN Declarations on labor and working conditions, including the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Resolution 2020 and the *Joint ASEAN-SEAFDEC Declaration on Regional Cooperation for Combating Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and Enhancing the Competitiveness of ASEAN Fish and Fishery Products*. The collective regional efforts to secure decent work is becoming cross-cutting and reference to labor, crew and migrant workers are being addressed in connection with the Regional Plan of Action on Sustainable Utilization of Neritic Tunas in the ASEAN Region (RPOA-Neritic Tunas), RPOA for Managing Fishing Capacity (RPOA-Fishing Capacity), efforts to combat illegal fishing, port inspections/port state measures, and on aspects related to safety at sea. SEAFDEC will continue to work with and strengthen cooperation with ILO, FAO, ASEAN and others to further, as suitable, develop the ASEAN Guidelines on Implementation of Labor Standards for the Fisheries Sector.

SEAFDEC Actions in Support of SDGs and Aichi Strategic Goals

The abovementioned brief overview indicates that there are many activities and efforts ongoing with regards to addressing the Sustainable Development Goals, thereby supporting efforts to reach the most appropriate but selected targets – although not referring to the SDGs as a whole. In the effort of SEAFDEC to promote ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management (EAFM), **Fig. 1** shows how the promoted actions support ecological well-being, human well-being, and good governance, and for the longer term, social and environmental sustainability of the Southeast Asian region. SEAFDEC would remain committed to work with the AMSs and its collaborating agencies in attaining the relevant targets of the SDGs, through the promotion of sustainable fisheries management in the region.



Fig. 1. Schema of the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management being promoted by SEAFDEC in the Southeast Asian region

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