

Mobilizing Regional Expertise to Alleviate Poverty by Fisheries Intervention in Southeast Asia: SEAFDEC Initiatives

Jariya Kankamnerd

The ASEAN and SEAFDEC acknowledge that addressing poverty issues could eventually lead to the reduction of socio-economic disparities in the ASEAN region, and that alleviating if not eradicating poverty in the countries in the region could pave the way for the ASEAN Community Building which as envisaged to be attained by 2015. Such concerns however, could only be effectively addressed through technical and development cooperation on the rational utilization of the fishery resources and in enhancing the capacity of the members of fishery communities. In addition, the capability of government officials should also be enhanced as part of the important strategy of ensuring long-term improvement of livelihoods and alleviation of poverty in the fishery communities. Towards achieving such objectives, SEAFDEC initiated in 2008 the two-year project on Human Resources Development (HRD) for Poverty Alleviation and Food Security by Fisheries Intervention in the ASEAN Region with financial support from the ASEAN Foundation through the Japan-ASEAN Solidarity Fund.

It is widely recognized that in Southeast Asia, the fisheries sector plays an important role in terms of producing food, generating income as well as in accelerating national social economic development, but the main contributor of this sector which are the fishery communities, still remains impoverished. In fact, the fishery communities are generally exposed to the multiple dimensions of poverty that include inadequate services, low level of education, politically poorly organized communities, and vulnerability to various factors that bring about poverty, among others, which are webbed into the complex conditions of the communities, making poverty alleviation difficult to achieve within a short span of time.

Since fish and fishery products remain the major source of protein for the peoples not only in Southeast Asia but all over the world, such commodities could boost the economies of the countries warranting the fisheries sector to influence the social and economic development of the fishery communities. The fisheries sector is therefore in a position to alleviate poverty in fishery communities only if sustainable resources utilization and management are put in place with the objective of enhancing the communities' livelihoods to ensure local food security of the communities.

Moreover, poverty alleviation in the fisheries sector should be made part of every country's sectoral policy and initiatives, which could include enhancing the human resource capacity of the concerned stakeholders.

It must be recalled that in 2001, the Southeast Asian countries developed a regional fisheries policy framework through the "Resolution and Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region" that were adopted by the ASEAN-SEAFDEC ministers responsible for fisheries. With the objective of alleviating poverty in the Southeast Asian region through fisheries intervention, Paragraph 5 and 6 of the Resolution specified the need to "*Encourage effective management of fisheries through delegation of selected management functions to the local level*", and "*Recognize the need to progressively replace open access to fisheries resources with limited access regimes through the introduction of rights-based fisheries which may also facilitate the management of fishing capacity and promote the use of responsible fishing gears and practices*".

Poverty Alleviation through Fisheries Intervention

The fishery communities are increasingly vulnerable to many factors such as natural hazards (due to the drastic changes in climatic conditions and unfavorable weather conditions such as typhoons, cyclones, seasonal fluctuation of fish stocks); economic disasters (increasing cost of fuel, fluctuating fish prices, poor market accessibility, intervention of middlemen in marketing); occupational risks



(poor living conditions, low educational level, inadequate medical care, unsafe fishing vessels and equipment); and political instability (weak and unfair law enforcement, top-down system of governance). The presence of any of these factors could lead to the chronic deterioration of the living conditions of the fishers (Kato, 2008).

Despite rapid and sustained rates of economic growth in the Southeast Asian region for several decades that resumed soon after the Asian economic crisis a decade ago, there are still structural reasons why an exogenous shock like a “global financial crisis” can adversely impact the poor in Southeast Asia. While USD1.0 a day purchasing power parity could be seen as extreme poverty line, USD2.0 a day should at least be considered in the Southeast Asian context as a poverty line, below which the population are already regarded as highly vulnerable to exogenous shocks, and hence are potentially liable to sink into extreme poverty if not supported through benefits and incentives (Santosh, 2009).

The statistics in 2006 showed that Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand have very low shares of the total population below the USD1.0 a day poverty line, significant shares of their population live below USD2.0 a day (Indonesia 52% and Thailand 32.5%). Meanwhile, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam, and the Philippines have significant shares of their populations living below the USD1.0 a day poverty line at 34.0%, 26.0%, 17.7%, and 14.6%, respectively (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAGP>).

In the Southeast Asian region, high priority has been placed by the governments in mobilizing agriculture for poverty reduction and this includes the fisheries sector. However, while agriculture and fisheries could play the roles as main provider of environmental services that could be tapped to alleviate poverty, the unwise use and inappropriate management of the natural resources could lead to environmental disaster and eventually further aggravating poverty in the rural areas. In order to support the efforts towards attaining the aforementioned objectives, it is also necessary for the stakeholders to have a common understanding of the important and relevant terminologies that have already been developed and established by various organizations.

For example, Marcelo (2006) defined poverty as a condition where opportunities and choices most basic to human development to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-respect and the respect of others, are denied. Poverty alleviation by fisheries intervention is a process by which

people are becoming measurably better off over time due to their involvement/investment in fisheries activities, while poverty alleviation specifically involves “poverty reduction and protection” (FAO, 2007). Moreover, Macfadyen and Huntington (2004) defined human capacity development as the process by which individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, and societies develop their abilities---both individually and collectively---to set and achieve certain objectives, perform functions, solve problems and to develop the means and conditions required to enable such process.

Many technical interventions within and outside the fisheries sector have been advanced by national and local governments, donor agencies, and the NGOs. However, these were predominantly aimed at accelerating foreign exchange earnings through the introduction of modern fishing technologies and infrastructure development. Little focus has been given to improving the living conditions of the poor fishers because their problems are considered less technical and such social and economic issues are difficult for external parties to handle. Thus, SEAFDEC with support from the ASEAN Foundation embarked on a project on Human Resources Development (HRD) for Poverty Alleviation and Food Security by Fisheries Intervention in the ASEAN Region from 2008 to 2010.

Role of Human Resource Development in Fisheries for Poverty Alleviation

Specifically, the HRD Project was envisaged to alleviate poverty in fishery communities by enhancing human capacity at the community level. Based on the technical expertise and capability of SEAFDEC in fisheries and aquaculture, five HRD thematic areas were identified by the ASEAN countries as means of facilitating the attainment of the HRD Project objectives. The thematic areas included local/indigenous institution and co-management, responsible fishing technologies, backyard fishery post-harvest technology, rural aquaculture, and inland fisheries development. The activities under each thematic area were conducted in the form of training of trainers by mobilizing the available regional expertise and maximizing the participation of local government officials, with the perception that the trainers would in turn train the relevant stakeholders on-site in their respective communities (**Box 1**). Moreover, the HRD Project focal points in the respective participating countries were also identified to champion the objectives of the HRD Project. The focal points comprise the relevant fisheries government officials, extension workers and those working at the local level of selected rural fishery communities.

Box 1. HRD on the thematic areas conducted in selected countries of Southeast Asia

Local/indigenous institution and co-management

As part of the activities of the HRD Project, a regional training course on local/indigenous institution and co-management was conducted to transfer technical knowledge to fisheries officials from the selected countries, the concepts of rights-based fisheries and co-management for poverty alleviation and food security.

Responsible fishing technologies

The on-site training on responsible fishing technologies was focused on responsible fishing and practices, fabrication of appropriate fishing gears and small-scale insulated fish box to improve the quality of the fish catch, safety at sea and fishing sail boat to reduce the cost of fishing investment by cutting down fuel oil expense as well as to reduce the pollution from oil discharged into the water.

Backyard fishery post-harvest technology

The skills of the Project focal points in basic fish handling and quality preservation, and simple fish processing technology to make value-added products from low-value edible fish were enhanced with the view that transferring the techniques to the stakeholders would also lead to the development of their skills in fish processing as a backyard industry in rural fishery communities, to improve their livelihood.

Rural aquaculture

The training adopted a conceptual framework with emphasis on four important factors in sustainable aquaculture, namely: (1) aquatic resources and environment; (2) appropriate and economically feasible aquaculture technologies; (3) socioeconomic attributes of fishing communities; and (4) policy issues and institutional arrangements related to a balanced fishery management and aquaculture livelihood.

Inland fisheries development

Although fisheries in the region play an important role in national social and economic development, many fishery communities remain poor especially the communities engaged in inland fisheries. Various factors contribute to the poverty level in inland fishery communities such as deteriorating habitats, competition for water uses by other sectors, and overfished resources especially among the communities relying on these resources for their living. The training therefore focused on the ways and means of addressing the concerns of these particular fishery communities such as conservation of inland water ecosystem, stock enhancement of inland waters, sustainable management of inland fisheries, supplementary sources of income from fishery-related activities (culture of food fish and ornamental aquatic species) and from non-fishery-related activities (ecotourism, backyard herbal gardening, and backyard handicraft industry), and livelihood management (establishing small-scale cooperatives, family economic management and project analysis).

Analyzing Poverty in Fisheries Communities

The success in the implementation of any activities depends on the attitude, understanding and values of the target stakeholders, which in the case of the HRD Project comprise the fishers, fish farmers, local/central government officers, and local peoples in fishery communities. While formal training generally impart knowledge on physical, social and mental skills, emphasis should also be made on the target stakeholders' attitudes, mental understanding and psychological values which are necessary to accomplish the objectives of the activities, where psychological values could include patience, honesty and humility. While skills development makes use of physical energy, values formation makes use of the psychological energy of the personality of individuals. Since in most cases, the effectiveness and accomplishments of the target stakeholders are limited compared to the potentials and opportunities that are available, improving personal effectiveness in attaining the Project objectives through values formation was made part of the HRD Project activities.

Empowerment of the fishery communities

The HRD Project gave more focus on capacity building to develop and/or improve indigenous/local institution that can help the people and enable them to cooperate with fisheries related agencies in achieving sustainable fisheries. The specific topics in the HRD activities included such areas as development of future leader(s), participation and recognition of the roles of women in gender equity and the youth, sustaining closer dialogue between communities and fisheries related agencies, provision of more and appropriate information, and the promotion of values formation among the people.

Considering that most members of the fishery communities are inadequately educated, there is also a need for national governments to exert efforts in improving infrastructures such as educational facilities in order that such efforts spread to the fishery communities. The HRD activities therefore, emphasized on the technical aspects balanced with socio-economic concerns. The materials used in the HRD activities were translated into the respective local languages to promote wider understanding of the technical terms. Moreover, study tours and case studies were also conducted to bring about better understanding of the ways of life in the fishery communities.



Practical session (left) and lecture (right) on backyard post-harvest technology

In selecting the target sites for the HRD activities, the important factor taken into consideration was the existence of organized groups as it would be convenient to select the target participants. The absence or shortage of community-based activities in a community could make it difficult to manage the activities. In addition, such organized groups have a good leader with confidence and able to get the support of the members. This means the need of improving the capability of the local groups' leaders by providing them leadership and management training, to enable them to take up leadership in the community activities.

Participatory approach was the key to the successful implementation of the HRD activities where in the implementation of the activities, the different ways of thinking and views among the older generation, women, and the youth in the community were assessed. The results were then used as appropriate approach in order to strike a balance of the interests of such stakeholders. This led to the empowerment of the concerned stakeholders that contributed to the effective implementation of the activities as well as effective establishment of the ownership of the activities by the relevant communities.

It should also be noted that after implementing the on-site HRD activities in selected pilot countries, an increasing number of fishery officials and extension workers also learn the concepts of responsible fisheries for food security and poverty alleviation. In order to sustain such interests, it is highly recommended that efforts should be made to promote the HRD activities as part of the countries' top priority policies on sustainable fisheries development. Specifically, extension workers should be trained in effective communication and negotiation skills, and their awareness of the issues in fisheries should be enhanced. On the other

hand, the capability of local government units should be boosted to enable their respective officers to take up the responsibility of implementing the HRD activities in the respective areas of responsibility.





Support for fishery communities in enhancing their fisheries livelihoods or alternative livelihoods related to fisheries and non-fisheries

As means of providing support for the creation of alternative livelihoods in the fishery communities, national governments should make sure that the members of the communities have access to the resources and basic services. Assistance could also be provided to the members in identifying the appropriate and suitable livelihoods, raising the awareness of the members on the mitigation measures for the impacts of climate change, and most of all heightening the government support to the communities.

While appropriate HRD activities would be provided via strengthened extension systems, emphasis should be given on the approach of encouraging communities to diversify their livelihoods other than fisheries in collaboration with other relevant agencies and organizations. This strategy could also address the inability of most fishery communities to access to resources and basic services. This could be achieved through the establishment of freshwater and marine protected areas, improving fish seed production centers and promoting stock enhancement, promoting ecotourism



Box 2. Regional policy recommendations from the HRD Project

- Development of the Regional Guidelines on Poverty Alleviation by Fisheries Intervention taking into consideration the draft regional policy recommendations should be initiated. This would however, require the need for further consultations to transform the policy recommendations into guidelines.
- Conduct relevant HRD activities in areas other than the selected pilot sites, which should be undertaken as soon as the Regional Guidelines are developed and adopted. The HRD activities could then include orientation and familiarization of the Regional Guidelines by the stakeholders to enable them to adapt the concept of the HRD activities in order to hasten the eradication of poverty in the regions' rural fishery communities.
- Identification of the specific roles of the various stakeholders, including the responsibilities of the ASEAN countries in the implementation of the Regional Guidelines in order to promote the implementation of HRD activities that could help eradicate poverty in the region. The role of SEAFDEC as the source of the technical support should also be specified.
- Identification of the appropriate agency responsible for monitoring the progress of the implementation of the Regional Guidelines for Poverty Alleviation by Fisheries Intervention, and the assessing the level of influence of the Regional Guidelines on the eradication of poverty in the ASEAN region.

and marine parks, and improving access to transportation and communication as well as health and safety facilities. Considering the experience in the promotion of “One Village, One Fisheries Products” (FOVOP) in the ASEAN region, the FOVOP approach could complement the support and promotion of livelihoods and poverty alleviation, as additional income sources for the fisheries communities.

Prior to the implementation of any HRD activities, it is necessary to assess the people's needs through the closely related approaches such as the Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). These methods are useful in gathering information that could provide understanding about the communities and respective members and address the requirements of the target communities. The results would also lead to adjustments to make the activities more appropriate and are in accordance with the needs and concerns of the members.

Awareness on the impacts of climate change to the fisheries communities had been made part of the HRD activities through capacity building of stakeholders on climate change adaptation and the measures that could mitigate the impacts of climate change. Specifically for aquaculture, practices that are adapted to climate change were promoted. This would need the strong support from national governments to build up the capacity of the communities to adapt to the impacts of climate change in the environment.

Box 3. Inputs from the HRD Project for the new decade Resolution and Plan of Action

Inputs for the Resolution

- “Strengthen the promotion of HRD activities for poverty alleviation by fisheries intervention through mobilization of available human and technological resources and harmonization of initiatives and support of the fisheries communities and governments”.

Inputs for Plan of Action

- Institution building on community organizations for community support and as basis for promotion of co-management in fisheries communities
- Improvement of members’ skills for expanding the potentials of accessing to alternative livelihoods
- Advancement of HRD on appropriate fishing, aquaculture, and post-harvest technologies for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture development in fisheries communities

Moreover, national governments should also intensify their support in various areas such as in co-management, R&D, infrastructure development, improvement of marketing systems and information, establishing small-scale cooperatives and micro-credit systems, and enhancing policy advocacy. Despite modernization of various fishing technologies, local fish marketing system has remained traditional system which had been identified as one of the problem areas that continue to drive the fishery communities to poverty. It should be noted that modernization of local market systems would require government legal and technical support for the target fishery communities to enable the members to improve their incomes.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The Second ASEAN-SEAFDEC Regional Technical Consultation on Human Resources Development for Poverty Alleviation and Food Security by Fisheries Intervention in the ASEAN Region was organized in June 2010 to review and assess the outcomes and achievements in the implementation of the HRD Project activities. During the said Consultation, regional policy recommendations were developed (Box 2) which could serve as guide for mainstreaming poverty alleviation and food security by fisheries intervention in the respective national policies. The materials developed through the HRD Project together with the regional policy recommendations could be used as reference to support the strengthening of national policies and initiatives in promoting HRD on poverty alleviation by fisheries intervention.

Proposed Inputs for the ASEAN-SEAFDEC “Fish for the People 2020: Adaptation to a Changing Environment” Conference

Noting the inter-linkages between poverty alleviation and food security leading to long-term sustainable development of fisheries, the regional policy recommendations should be articulated and mainstreamed into the preparation and finalization of the new decade Resolution and Plan of Action (Box 3), which will be concluded at the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Conference on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security Towards 2020 “Fish for the People 2020: Adaptation to a Changing Environment” from 13 to 17 June 2010 in Bangkok, Thailand.

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About the Author

Dr. Jariya Kankamnerd is a Policy and Program Officer of SEAFDEC based at the SEAFDEC Secretariat Office in Bangkok, Thailand. She is the Coordinator of the SEAFDEC HRD Project on Human Resources Development for Poverty Alleviation and Food Security by Fisheries Intervention in the ASEAN Region.