

# Capacity Building in Fisheries Information: SEAFDEC Initiatives

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SEAFDEC was established in December 1967 for the purpose of promoting sustainable fisheries development in the Southeast Asian region through research, training and information dissemination. As incorporated in its mandate, SEAFDEC is specifically tasked to support its Member Countries in strengthening their capacities to steer their fisheries towards responsible and sustainable development.

For almost 40 years, SEAFDEC accomplished major achievements in capacity building in the various aspects of sustainable fisheries development. The most significant of which is the promotion of the global Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) in the region through the development starting in 1998 of regional technical guidelines that cover responsible fishing operations, fisheries management, aquaculture and post-harvest practices and trade. The adoption of the SEAFDEC Strategic Plan in 1998 also enabled SEAFDEC to embark on new challenges to support the Member Countries in complying with new fisheries instruments and requirements at international, regional and national levels. Later, the „Resolution and Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region“ adopted during the 2001 ASEAN-SEAFDEC Conference on Sustainable Fisheries in the New Millennium: „Fish for the People“, provided SEAFDEC with the regional policy frameworks in order to attain sustainable fisheries in the region under the guiding principles of the CCRF. These accomplishments were materialized through the capacity building initiatives that SEAFDEC has been pursuing in the region for the past 40 years.

Capacity building, as defined by UNDP is the process of strengthening abilities in a sustainable manner to improve competence. A process which is over and beyond training, capacity building involves the task of developing humans as well as institutions specifically encompassing the development of human resources, organizational structures, and institutional and legal frameworks. The basic components of capacity building have been put together by SEAFDEC in its overall objective of promoting sustainable fisheries development in the region. One very important endeavor initiated by SEAFDEC in order to attain its objectives is capacity building in fisheries information.

## Fisheries Information in the ASEAN

The region’s current fisheries information is collected in a fragmented manner because the objectives for data and information collection including fisheries statistics are rather

vague. Collection of information on the status and trend of fisheries and aquaculture either at regional or national level should therefore be intensified in order to aptly illustrate the fisheries situation of a country in particular and the region in general. In addition, from the actual situation, data and information gaps particularly for management purposes should be identified in order to prioritize efforts and allocation of resources to fill up such gaps. Specifically targeting also the ASEAN region, the need to collect information has been emphasized in the CCRF (**Box 1**).

Considering therefore, that the promotion of effective information and communication has become increasingly important for planning as well as management purposes, and in order to address concerns spelled out in the global CCRF and supplemented by the directives in the Resolution and Plan of Action adopted in 2001, SEAFDEC intensified its efforts in capacity building in fisheries information. Such efforts come in the form of collecting and processing information, and exchanging and sharing such information with all the stakeholders. Moreover, in the formulation of communication and information policies for the region, efforts to enhance the visibility of the SEAFDEC’s roles and its contributions to the development of sustainable fisheries in region.

### Box 1: Related provisions on the need to collect fisheries information (CCRF)

“States should assign priority to undertake research and data collection in order to improve scientific and technical knowledge of fisheries including their interaction with the ecosystem” (Article 6.4); and that “The absence of adequate scientific information should not be used as a reason for postponing or failing to take measures to conserve target species, associated or dependent species and non-target species and their environment” (Article 6.5). Moreover, the CCRF also emphasized that “States should ensure that timely, complete and reliable statistics on catch and fishing effort are collected and maintained in accordance with applicable international standards and practices ...”; and that “States should compile and disseminate such data in a manner consistent with any applicable confidentiality requirements” (Article 7.4.4). The CCRF also indicated that “Subregional or regional fisheries management organizations ... should compile data and make them available, ... in a timely manner and in an agreed format to all members ... in accordance with agreed procedures” (Article 7.4.7).

## SEAFDEC Initiatives in Developing Fisheries Information Systems and Management

One of the most significant activities that SEAFDEC has sustained through the years is on the improvement of fishery statistics and information for planning and management of fisheries in the ASEAN region. Through this activity, SEAFDEC assists the Member Countries in achieving sustainable fisheries based on sound fisheries policies and management strategies derived from quality statistics, data and information. Thus, SEAFDEC continues to improve the collection and usage of statistics, data and information at national level; identify and establish linkages among all sources of available data and information; and enhance the quality, reliability, availability and timeliness of statistics.

Since fishery statistics is one of the very important tools that can be used to facilitate fisheries development planning and management, SEAFDEC continues to compile fishery statistics not only for use at the national level but also for regional and international purposes to enable a broader exchange of fishery statistics and information. The information collected by SEAFDEC through the region's national fishery statistics systems has been compiled in the Fishery Statistical Bulletin for the South China Sea Area which SEAFDEC published annually since 1978.

SEAFDEC also published in 2006 the Regional Guidelines on Fishery Statistics in the ASEAN Region as part of the Supplementary Guidelines on Responsible Fisheries Management to provide regional reference or checklist for countries in the region interested in reviewing and improving their respective national fishery statistical system. Although the Regional Guidelines on Fishery Statistics in the ASEAN Region focused on improving fishery statistics for capture fisheries in the region, the Handbook on Collecting Fishery Statistics for Inland and Coastal Fisheries published by



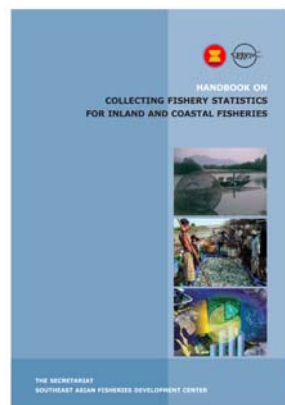
*Regional Workshop on Improvement of Fishery Statistics and Information (15-18 February 2005, Indonesia)*

SEAFDEC in 2004 could be used as guide in dealing with inland and coastal fishery statistics.

## Human Resource Development

Human resource development (HRD) aims to equip individuals with the necessary skills and technologies and providing them access to information. Since HRD is one of the original mandates of SEAFDEC, it has continued during the past 40 years to conduct training courses on the various aspects of fisheries at its four departments: the Training Department (TD) in Thailand for marine capture fisheries; Aquaculture Department (AQD) in the Philippines for farming of aquatic species; Marine Fisheries Research Department (MFRD) in Singapore for fish post-harvest technology; and the Marine Fishery Resources Development and Management Department (MFRDMD) in Malaysia for marine fishery resources conservation and management, while the SEAFDEC Secretariat implements HRD in fisheries information as well as HRD to promote the implementation of the CCRF in the region.

In a bid to improve the human resource capability of the region, SEAFDEC implements the Information and Communication Strategies which include various approaches, viz: (1) production of relevant, timely and useful information materials meeting the requirements of the target audience; (2) capacity development of information staff and workers at all levels; (3) improving the accessibility of SEAFDEC information to target groups; (4) strengthening of the cooperation and networking with other relevant organizations; (5) enhancing communication and information sharing; and (6) regular monitoring and evaluation of regional information activities.



*The Fishery Statistical Bulletin (left); and Handbook on Collecting Fishery Statistics for Inland and Coastal Fisheries (right)*

## Organizational Management Structure Development

SEAFDEC continues to assist the member countries in the development of their fisheries organizational management structure through the promotion of sustainable fisheries management strategies and collaborating with international organizations concerned with sustainable fisheries management. One such linkage is with the Fishery Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) sustained since 2004 which has facilitated the collection of fisheries status and trend information, as important tools to support planning and management of fisheries in the ASEAN region.

It was through its partnership arrangement with FIRMS that enabled SEAFDEC to pursue related activities including the case study on development of a test inventory of shark fisheries in Southeast Asian countries based on data/information from a SEAFDEC program on „Management of Fisheries and Utilization of Shark in Southeast Asia%. Thus, the Fisheries Module on Shark of Thailand which was submitted to FIRMS Database and Module Development has already been presented in the fact sheet. The Fisheries Module on Shark of the other ASEAN countries that are still being developed will also be submitted by SEAFDEC to FIRMS, and it is expected that all these efforts will greatly benefit the Member Countries.

## Institutional and Legal Framework Development

SEAFDEC has been assisting the ASEAN countries in the implementation of the CCRF not only through human resource development but also through organizational as well as legal framework development. Specifically, SEAFDEC collaborates with the Coordinating Working Party on Fisheries Statistics (CWP) of FAO in order to strengthen the capacity of the Member Countries in implementing activities related to statistics compilation, paving the way for the improved quality of the region's fishery statistics as enhanced through the development and harmonization of common definitions, classifications and standards.

SEAFDEC also implemented the three-year project „Towards Better Utilization and Harmonized Information for Fisheries Management in Southeast Asia% from 2007 to 2009, which will be used as basis for collaborative activities with CWP, FAO and other regional fisheries bodies (RFBs) on issues related to fishery statistics and information. Besides, ASEAN and SEAFDEC convened the Regional Technical Consultation on Management of Fishing Capacity and Human Resource Development in Support of Fisheries

Management in Southeast Asia% in Thailand in 2006 to discuss among others, the usefulness of the regional mechanism to regulate fishing capacity at sub-regional level (Gulf of Thailand, Malacca Strait, Andaman Sea, South China Sea and Sulu or Celebes Sea) as well as the need for improving fisheries management particularly addressing issues such as fishing capacity and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.

The ASEAN-SEAFDEC „Experts Meeting on Fisheries Statistics, Information and Indicators% held in Thailand also in 2006 has initially considered the establishment of the Regional Scientific Advisory Committee on Information for Fisheries Management to enhance information collection for fisheries management. However, this is still in the process of thorough discussion by concerned authorities in the region.

## Conclusion and Way Forward

During the adoption of Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries since 1995 and the UN Fish Stock Agreement since 1994, the Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) have focused their main roles and functions on fisheries management for certain identified fisheries stocks in the region (semi-enclosed areas) and high sea fisheries. Since there has been clamors to develop new RFMOs to work on the gaps for areas/stocks not covered by existing arrangements and since the Southeast Asian region has been recognized as one of the few vacuum regions that do not currently fall under competent management areas of any RFMO, the need to investigate appropriate collaborative mechanism/arrangement for regional fisheries management in this region was deemed necessary. The Southeast Asian region has very limited high sea areas and its fisheries management has been critically constrained by the ineffective control of fishing capacity and other activities within national waters particularly fishing vessels encroaching into the EEZs of other countries putting much pressure on the already degraded fisheries resources. The mobility of capacity between jurisdictions leads to regular fishery conflicts between the large and small-scale fisheries and between fishing nations. Therefore more effective governance in fisheries, which is the goal of several regional organizations and countries in the region, should be put in its proper perspective and should be considered with utmost importance.

The relatively scarce information on the status of the fishery resources and the degree of fishing capacity in the region's waters also constrain any further management action. Although there may be information now available to trigger the necessary action, this apparent uncertainty continues





to limit effective decision making on the management of fishing capacity especially the IUU fishing. The domestic situation in many countries of the region and inadequate human capacity and resources to deal with these issues requires a systematic regional approach.

Towards this end, there is a need to develop appropriate regional mechanism reflecting the region's efforts in promoting sustainable fisheries. This means that regional fisheries management issues should be considered an urgent agenda for SEAFDEC to push through. Since there is a growing concern on the sustainable fisheries issues in the international arena, increasing pressures in achieving sustainable fisheries will soon become very apparent for the Southeast Asian region. This is therefore a very appropriate time for the region to think about a mechanism that would expedite the required fisheries management actions through collective regional efforts.

The Resolution and Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region adopted in 2001 provide regional policy framework and priority actions including those of fisheries management. In addition, the Regional Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries Management in Southeast Asia and the Supplementary Guidelines (containing regional guidelines for co-management using group user rights for small-scale fisheries, fishery statistics, use of indicators for management of marine capture fisheries, and fisheries *refugia*) also provide standards to improve fisheries management under the framework of the CCRF. Considering these structures, the promotion of sustainable fisheries management in the Southeast Asian region could be enhanced through regional collaborative

efforts for fisheries management taking into consideration the need to address the following major issues:

- Clearly defined fishery data and information needs for the formulation of management policies and programs;
- Close linkage between research activities and data collection on one hand and fisheries management policy, programs and actions on the other; and
- Clearly defined and harmonized fisheries management methodologies and approaches as well as maintaining dialogues among stakeholders particularly at the regional level on implementation of such methodologies and approaches.

Although there has been no appropriate forum to specifically discuss about fisheries management issues in the region based on the understanding that fisheries management issues are prerogatives of the respective national fisheries-related authority of the countries, SEAFDEC will continue to promote a regional framework on fisheries management through capacity building in fisheries information that can be complementary to the national fisheries management actions, and coordinate such actions within the countries in the region.

#### About The Author

**Pouchamarn Wongsanga** is the Information Program Coordinator of SEAFDEC based at the Secretariat in Bangkok, Thailand. Started working at the Research Division of TD in 1984, she has acquired vast knowledge and experience in coastal fisheries management, fisheries socio-economics and fishery statistics.