

# One Village, One Fisheries Product – for Food Security and Poverty Alleviation

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The ASEAN Foundation-funded project on Promotion of One Village, One Fisheries Product (FOVOP) System implemented by SEAFDEC aims to improve the livelihood of fishing communities in the ASEAN region. Focusing on human resources development by mobilizing existing regional technical cooperation schemes and expertise, the project also aims to enhance the capacity of women and optimize their participation in the various economic activities in fishing communities. Already in its wrap up stage, the project is envisaged to come up with the regional guidelines and strategies for the promotion of FOVOP in the ASEAN region.

While many Southeast Asian countries are still in the process of improving their respective fisheries management systems to alleviate poverty, the region's generally depleting fishery resources has continued to contribute to the deteriorating livelihoods of households in fishing communities. Although information from the world's fishery statistics may have always pictured the region with very impressive fisheries production and trade figures, concerns have always been raised on the inability of fisheries to continue providing stable livelihoods and ensuring food security. In 2006 for example, FAO (2008) reported that the Southeast Asian region contributed about 15% of the world's total production from fisheries with Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam as the top producing countries. Moreover, in terms of export of fish and fishery products during the same year, the region's total accounted for about 14% in terms of quantity and 15% in terms of value with Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam as the region's major exporting countries.

Export of fish and fisheries products from the region was valued about USD12.5 billion in 2006. There is no doubt therefore, that fisheries have been playing important role in accelerating the region's economic development. However, such scenario is bound to reverse if fisheries management systems are not put in their proper place for the sustainable development of fisheries in the region.

Various factors could be attributed to the non-responsible practice of fisheries management. These have, in one way or another, deterred the efforts of many countries in the region to achieve sustainability in fisheries and alleviate poverty in fishing communities. These include among others, the vicious cycles of resource utilization and over-capacity in fisheries, which have been aggravated by the lack of alternative livelihoods in fishing communities (Kato, 2008a and 2008b). Although management interventions have been advanced by the countries in the region to try to get out from such vicious cycles, a possible way out could be to provide alternatives for fishers to initiate small business using their catch through value-adding, which they are not able to pursue at present due to limited technical and financial capabilities, and exacerbated by the competitive marketing situation for fish and fisheries products in the markets.

## One Village, One Fisheries Product: SEAFDEC Initiative

In an effort to address the incessant poverty situation in fishing communities, SEAFDEC has implemented the project on the Promotion of "One Village, One Fisheries

**Box 1. Guidelines to promote FOVOP through human resource development (HRD) activities**

- 1) modernization of domestic fish marketing system through public fish auctions in fishing communities to activate the economy in rural communities and uniquely recognize the fishing communities as fish producing centers;
- 2) product development and improvement by identifying the differentiated fish product of a fishing community using its unique resources in order to avoid competition with similar or the same products;
- 3) institutional set-up and human resource development by organizing fishers groups with specific purposes including conduct of public auctions and production of differentiated products; and
- 4) mobilizing women's group and enhancing the involvement of young generation in rural economic activities.

Product" (FOVOP) System to Improve the Livelihood of the Fisheries Communities in the ASEAN Region with financial support from the Japan-ASEAN Solidarity Fund through the ASEAN Foundation. The two-year project aims to improve fisheries livelihoods through the introduction and promotion of the FOVOP concept. Following the "One Village, One Product" or OVOP strategy promoted by Japan and considering similar approaches in the Southeast Asian region more particularly the "One Tambon, One Product" or the OTOP initiative of Thailand, FOVOP is being fostered to produce "Only One Product" in order to reduce competition from the fishing industry where local producers identify and advance a unique and differentiated artisanal fishery product and related activities from each particular community (Kato, 2006).

In order to hasten the initiation of the project, government officers from the ASEAN countries were convened in a technical consultation in Thailand in March 2008 to develop the guidelines for the advancement of FOVOP in the region with the aim of seeking "Only One, not Number One" fish product. Such guidelines (**Box 1**) had been used as basis for organizing the national human resource development (HRD) workshops which comprise the major activity of the FOVOP project.

Based on such guidelines, learning materials have been prepared to facilitate the conduct of the national HRD workshops including institution building for the women's groups in the fishing communities, with special emphasis on the need to motivate the community people to take active and leading role in the FOVOP movement. The project also necessitates the conduct of case studies in selected sites of the ASEAN countries in the form of local HRD workshops where representatives from identified women's groups continued to be the main players and where the materials used have been translated into the local languages for wider dissemination and usage. The results of the case studies included the identification of more detailed and localized

potentials and problem areas as well as the potential post-project activities to be implemented by the respective countries. Based on the findings through local consultations and through the case studies, the HRD materials had been finalized as well as the regional strategies and guidelines. It is envisaged that through the exchange of experiences on the issues in the region, the level of awareness of the local people on FOVOP could be greatly enhanced.

## Experiences from the FOVOP Case Studies

Many countries in the Southeast Asian region have their respective national policies related to OVOP production. Thailand for example, has been promoting its "One Tambon, One Product" or OTOP movement, while other countries in the region have also been promoting similar movements as means of alleviating poverty in the rural areas. However, most of the OVOP-related products in the region very seldom include those produced from the fisheries sector. National HRD workshops were therefore conducted in pilot countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, and Vietnam) as case studies in order to identify the potential and unique fishery products and related services that could be promoted under the FOVOP project as source of additional incomes for the local people. Moreover, the issue on gender and development in the region has also been embedded in the HRD activities as this could also facilitate the development of the appropriate strategies for the promotion of FOVOP in the region.

Under the FOVOP initiative, the need for women empowerment is considered significant in order to make full use of their traditional knowledge in processing fisheries products and offer opportunities for women to shift their role towards economic development in the communities. From their traditional duties of taking care of their families and helping husbands in fishing, sorting fish or marketing fish, women in the communities could be involved in more productive activities to enable them to contribute to the economies of the communities. It is interesting to note that the results of the case studies pointed to fact that women with their innate good common sense, have potentials to manage business and finances efficiently. Thus, formalizing and institutionalizing the women's groups should be promoted to capitalize on their capabilities in generating additional incomes for their households.

At this early stage, the marketing strategy for the respective countries' potential products and services under FOVOP could be initially directed towards the local markets and those in adjacent villages and communities rather than in the urban markets. Traditional fisheries products derived from marine and freshwater aquatic resources that include fermented fish, salted fish, boiled and dried fish are among



the food preference of many peoples in the Southeast Asian region.

Improving the quality and standard of such traditional products as raised during the conduct of the case studies, could promote the development of the local consumers' preference and through multiplier effect the products could be promoted later in urban areas. However, since drastic improvement of the domestic market system and consumers' preference could be difficult to undertake at this early stage, certain potential products could be initially and gradually promoted. Considering also that traditional fisheries products have their own unique characteristics, development of hygienic methods of processing and value-adding such as simple quality control and good manufacturing practices as well as enhancing packaging techniques had been identified as among the top priority activities in order that traditional fisheries products could generate incomes for the fishing communities. Eventually, as international standards and requirements for food safety are met, then the FOVOP products could be destined for the export market.

Moreover, it has always been identified that the fishing communities lack the financial resources to be able to pursue alternative livelihoods. In order to address this concern, a community-based credit system could be established using the peoples' savings, so that the local people can gain access and opportunities to obtain loans at low interest rates, for the improvement of their products and services. Lessons could be learned from the experience of Thailand, where women's groups handle their own business activities that include processing of fish and non-fish products as well as marketing and networking. The principle of the these women's groups involves saving funds for investment in business ventures, and manages certain portions for capital funds to set up soft loans with low interest rates for their group members to avail of. From the profit, the groups also make it a point to return part of the funds as incentives or dividends to members of good standing.

In Indonesia for example, there is a national program on Fisheries Product Processing Centralization which is being implemented by the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries. Under this program, the fishing communities are involved in the promotion of potential products and services, and thus, could be likened to the FOVOP project being promoted by SEAFDEC. Moreover, the possible establishment of a finance consultant banking partner, *e.g.* the KKMB of Indonesia, could be promoted under the FOVOP concept in order to increase the competencies of the fishing communities in aquaculture development, fish processing, management and marketing, and increase their access to banking and other fund providers. Indonesia's KKMB (Konsultan Keuangan Mitra Bank) is a legal institution that provides business development services in

order to improve the performance of the Micro-Business, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) of the country. The KKMB has in fact, assisted the fishing communities in certain provinces of Indonesia, in the preparation of credit proposals for banks and credit support with low interest rates through the country's 'community economic empowering or PEMP', mainly for infrastructure development and equipment enhancement.

At any rate, it is necessary to develop marketing strategies to address the domestic market issues such as price of fish, supply and demand of fish, fish consumption level and extensive distribution. The strategies could include product innovation and development, efficiency in all sectors, good cooperation with distributors or associations, product certification, and good promotion as well creation of dialogue partners in the respective areas.

In Lao PDR, a local credit system has been successfully handled by groups of local fishers and fish farmers, where management involves providing revolving loans with low interest rates to the group members. The system has provided accessible source of loans which helped the members in particular, to get away from being dependent on fisheries middlemen. The key factor of the success of the credit system is the members' responsibility of using the loans for improving their capacity in fisheries as well as in paying their debts on time and complying with the groups' regulations. One specific example is the community-based credit system in Ban Donxaioudom Village, Keooudom District in Vientiane Province where the local women-fishers established themselves into a group and initiated monthly savings activity among the group members. The group now provides revolving loans allocation and manages their own funds. This system could therefore be promoted to build up funds in a community and to be developed as source of funds that the local fishers can avail of to pursue their local business and economic ventures.

Aquaculture could also be introduced as alternative means to promote FOVOP in order to offer chances for additional source of income to local people. Aquaculture could be conducted in ponds, cages and pens in shallow waters. Aside from selling the aquaculture produce fresh, good aquaculture farm management could be promoted as part of an ecotourism program to create additional income. Another parallel activity that could be promoted under the FOVOP project is the enhancement of fish habitats in the communities' conservation areas through the installation of artificial reefs which could also be made part of a marine ecotourism service as well as practical experience in monitoring, surveillance and control to protect the conservation areas from illegal fishing operations. In addition, income generating activities like making handicrafts from fish scales and fish skin could also be

promoted to optimize ecotourism activities. This could also offer opportunities for local people to recognize the significance of utilizing by-products from fish processing while also taking advantage of available local natural resources.

Furthermore, since the role of the Community Fisheries (CF) in Cambodia has been institutionalized specifically in fishery resources management and community economic development such as in fish processing, ecotourism and aquaculture, the CF could be a venue for the promotion of the FOVOP project in the country. Similarly, with the CF also being institutionalized in Lao PDR, this could also be tapped to intensify the promotion of FOVOP in Lao PDR. In the promotion of FOVOP, it is necessary to also mitigate the social aspect of the economic problem situation in fishing communities. Thus, bottom-up approach should be adopted to hasten the diversification of potentials and uniqueness of products in the local communities. During the case studies in the Philippines, Myanmar and Vietnam, local government officials were invited to participate in the HRD workshops to keep them aware of the activities and the requirements that the local people would need in the promotion of FOVOP. Considering that infrastructures like roads, fishing ports and the like, are important to distribute the FOVOP products to adjacent and nearby communities, it is imperative that government support is enhanced for the improvement of such infrastructures and facilities. Overall however, it is necessary to establish the fishers into groups to empower themselves and be able to gain access to financial systems and organize a community-based credit system for their members as well as develop confidence and convincing power during negotiations with policy-makers.

## Way Forward

As means of reviewing the HRD materials and exchanging the experiences from the case studies to be able to finalize the regional strategies and guidelines (**Box 2**) for the promotion of FOVOP in the region, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RTC on the Promotion of FOVOP in ASEAN Region was organized by SEAFDEC in Chiangmai, Thailand from 22 to 26 March 2010.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> RTC served as a forum for sharing of experiences among the SEAFDEC Member Countries to support future national activities and recommend future possible post-project activities for implementation later in respective countries. The RTC also discussed the possible development of a regional network for the promotion of FOVOP in the ASEAN region in order to follow-up and speed up the momentum that had been initiated since the start of the implementation of the FOVOP project. As the ultimate goal of the project, the proposed regional network can act as a core function linking SEAFDEC with the respective national

### Box 2. Output of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RTC on the Promotion of FOVOP in ASEAN Region

1. Regional Strategy and Guidelines for the promotion of FOVOP in ASEAN Region
2. Regional Strategy and Guidelines for the Support of Government Agencies on the Promotion of FOVOP
3. Regional Guidelines for the Mobilization of the Micro-Credit and Marketing Promotion in Rural Areas
4. Regional Guidelines on the Identification of the FOVOP Products
5. Policy Brief on the Promotion of FOVOP in the ASEAN Region: Issues, Challenges and Ways Forward for Future Cooperation

networks. Moreover, the experience gained by SEAFDEC from the promotion of the FOVOP strategy would be further enhanced during the follow-up phases in order to promote alternative livelihood in fishing communities using the approaches of the FOVOP project.

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