

Strengthening Institutional Capability and Participatory Mechanism in Coastal Fisheries Management through Rights-based Fisheries and Co-management

Sumitra Ruangsivakul

Many literatures have indicated that:

*Rights to a share of the fisheries are distributed through various **fishery management systems** which could be characterized by the nature of the rights, the constitution of the shares in fisheries, different stakeholders that hold the rights, and the laws guiding the use of the rights. Fisheries rights comprise a stack of individual rights (could be pictured as a bundle of sticks that comprises individual sticks) such as rights of access to fisheries, rights to extract and manage the fishery resources, exclusion from the rights, and transfer of rights, among others. Such pile of rights varies with the different fisheries in different regions in the world. It is widely known that in the past, an individual fisher had only one exclusive right which is the right to own the fish he caught, while other rights were held in common. As entry to fisheries became limited, those who held permits gained the exclusive right to fish.*

Rights to some fisheries have been more exclusive by assigning individual fishers or fisher groups (i.e. communities, cooperatives, corporations) the rights to extract a designated portion of the total allowable catch in a given fishery resource. Attempts had been made by some countries to improve the benefits by converting most of the rights in the stack of rights from shared rights to exclusive rights by creating certain forms of individual or group rights that are put up for sale to fishers or fisher groups. The holder of rights could be an individual (a person or corporation), community, cooperative, or nominated representatives of a group. Recently, rights in some fisheries are vested in a cooperative or community organization, which has the authority to allocate and monitor the use of a given resource. However, this situation could lead to concentration of fishing rights with few owners since the limited pools of owners could have increasing power over access to the resources. Since such form of fishing rights could not improve the responsibilities of stakeholders in looking after the resources, community ownership of rights is considered more appropriate since individual concentration of ownership could be prevented. Share in the fisheries could be in terms of amount of fish catch, units of fishing effort (such as days at sea), and exclusive geographical areas and time period allowed for fishing. However, since the sum of all shares in fisheries should not lead to overfishing, some fishing countries have adopted additional regulations, such as limiting the size of fish for exploitation and sold which applies to all right holders in fisheries.

***Co-management** is a condition when two or more social players negotiate, define and guarantee among themselves a system of fair sharing of management functions, entitlements and responsibilities for a given territory, area or set of natural resources. Many authors define fisheries co-management as a partnership arrangement in which the fishers and government share the responsibility and authority to manage the fisheries. The partners develop a formal agreement on their respective roles, responsibilities and rights in fisheries management through consultations and negotiations. Although individual fishers are usually represented through various organizations or associations, other partners could also include other industry players such as boat owners, fish traders, fish processors, environmental groups, academic and research institutions, as well as representatives of the civil society. Co-management does not necessarily mean that the total control of management is given to fishers, in fact, not all responsibility and authority for management is given to fishers. The level of responsibility and/or authority taken by the government and fishers varies depending on the location and specific conditions. For example, for certain aquatic species that remain in one water area during most of its life cycle, such as crustaceans and mollusks, high level of responsibility in management could be vested to the fishers. The kind and extent of the responsibility and/or authority given to fishers is ultimately a political decision, with the government maintaining the balance of power in co-management.*

Promoting Rights-based Fisheries and Co-management in the Southeast Asian Region

SEAFDEC is implementing a five-year program (2008-2012) which aims to promote right-based fisheries in the Southeast Asian region through co-management approach for small-scale fisheries. In order to attain the program objectives, two strategies have been identified and emphasized during the program implementation, *i.e.*

institutional building and participatory mechanism. The component on institutional building is being carried out in accordance with the provisions spelled out in the Regional Guidelines for Co-management using Group User Rights for Small-scale Fisheries in Southeast Asia (SEAFDEC, 2006).

Meanwhile, participatory mechanism which aims to foster the participation of interested parties in the decision-making processes for the development and adoption of

policies and management frameworks for the sustainable development of the fishery resources is being enhanced by creating an enabling environment for sharing of power, responsibilities and functions for the fisheries management. Specifically, stakeholders are encouraged to participate in the decision-making processes for the formulation and regulation of functions, responsibilities and authority for fisheries management through human resource development exercises such as training sessions and workshops. The knowledge gained from such exercise is expected to enable stakeholders to apply the concept of co-management and rights-based fisheries in accordance with their respective national fisheries legal framework for coastal fisheries management.

In the promotion of rights-based fisheries and co-management in Southeast Asia, the program which has received funding from the Japanese Trust Fund has been conducting a series of training courses and workshops (**Box 1**) that aim to strengthen the capability of the Member Countries of SEAFDEC in the aspect of co-management and rights-based fisheries for the sustainable development

of fisheries in the Southeast Asian region, and specifically to clarify the role of fishers in co-management, especially their commitments to be involved in the management which requires high initial investment in terms of time as well as in financial and human resources. During the training sessions, the participants were made to understand that in order to support co-management, sufficient political will is necessary especially in the decision-making process to ensure that the necessary measures are in place.

It is well-recognized that co-management may not be applicable for all types of fisheries, especially in the Southeast Asia region where fisheries are multi-species and multi-gear. Co-management is however, more appropriate for aquatic species that stay in one area for most of its life cycle. In this regard, co-management may not always be an alternative fisheries management strategy as it requires restructuring the current system of fisheries management. Therefore, the SEAFDEC program makes it a point that the objective in co-management is focused on providing the opportunity for all stakeholders to improve their sense of responsibility in looking after the resources,

Box 1. Training course/workshops to promote rights-based fisheries and co-management

Regional Training Course on Coastal Fisheries Management on 27 October - 7 November 2008 had participants coming from eight ASEAN-SEAFDEC Member Countries, namely: Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. The first part of the regional training course comprising lectures was conducted at SEAFDEC Training Department in Samut Prakan, Thailand, while the second part involved on-site practices in Rayong and Trat Provinces of Thailand. The training also provided avenue for exchanging of experiences and knowledge in rights-based fisheries and co-management as part of the training.

Regional Training Course on Rights-based Fisheries and Co-management for Small-scale Fisheries, 26 October to 4 November 2009 had eight participants coming from the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Member Countries. The lectures given during the training focused on the concept of community-based fisheries management, rights-based fisheries and co-management for improving coastal resource management, and community development and institution building for local people's organizations especially the fisher groups.

Regional Training Course on Co-management using Group User Rights for Enhancing Small-scale Fisheries Development and Management, 20-28 September 2010 had 12 participants from the SEAFDEC Member Countries. The lectures included the scope and characteristics of co-management through rights-based fisheries focusing on fishing rights, as well as participatory method of co-management in small-scale fisheries. The participants also presented their respective countries' reports on fisheries co-management for small-scale fisheries. Site visits were also conducted to 4 provinces, namely: Samutsakorn, Phetchburi, Chantaburi and Trat to enable the participants to discuss with fisher groups on various issues including microcredit management.

Regional Workshop on the Promotion and Strategic Implementation of Fisheries Co-management and Rights-based Fisheries for Enhancing Good Governance in Coastal and Inland Fisheries Management, 2-3 February 2012, Bangkok, Thailand. A SWOT analysis was conducted to practice the concept of strategic planning in co-management. Results of the SWOT analysis were used to prepare the strategy for promoting co-management and achieve good governance in coastal and inland fisheries management. During discussion, the participants proposed that the strategy on "Efficient Enhancement of Co-management Practices in Southeast Asia" should have three main objectives, namely: to enhance fisheries resources for sustainable use, improve livelihoods in communities, and promote responsible fisheries practices. The participants in the Regional Workshop comprised the representatives from fisheries agencies of the SEAFDEC Member Countries.



Participants during the training courses and workshop conducted by SEAFDEC

enhancing management decision-making, and establishing a continuum of communication systems among the government, fishers and other stakeholders.

Way Forward

The Resolution and Plan of Action adopted during the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Conference on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security Towards 2020 “Fish for the People 2020: Adaptation to a Changing Environment” in June 2011 (SEAFDEC, 2011) promote the establishment and implementation of comprehensive policies for an ecosystem approach to fisheries management through effective systems, such as: (i) development of licensing system to fish (boats, gear and people); (ii) provision of community fishing rights/rights-based fisheries; (iii) development of supporting legal and institutional frameworks; (iv) promotion of institutional cooperation; and (v) assistance in streamlining co-management. Such provision should therefore be regarded as a call for policy makers to consider especially the adoption of co-management at all levels by involving relevant stakeholders in the process of planning and policy formulation especially in the management, conservation and rehabilitation of habitats, as well as on the use and management of natural and human resources. Therefore, guided by the relevant provisions in the Resolution and Plan of Action, SEAFDEC will continue to implement effective management systems in fisheries

especially through the ecosystem approach to fisheries in order to enhance the social and economic benefits that could be derived by all stakeholders.

References

- Borrini-Feyerabend, G., M. T. Farvar, J. C. Nguinguri, and V. A. Ndangang. 2000. Co-management of Natural Resources: Organising, Negotiating and Learning-by-Doing. GTZ and IUCN, Kasperek Verlag, Heidelberg, Germany
- Pomeroy, R.S. and M. Ahmed. 2006. Fisheries and Coastal Resources Co-management in Asia: Selected Results from a Regional Research Project (WorldFish Center Studies and Reviews, No. 30). WorldFish Center, Penang, Malaysia
- SEAFDEC. 2006. Supplementary Guidelines on Co-management using Group User Rights, Fishery Statistics, Indicators, and Fisheries *Refugia*. Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, Bangkok, Thailand. 84 p
- SEAFDEC. 2011. Resolution and Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region Towards 2020. Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, Bangkok, Thailand; 23 p

About the Author

Ms. Sumitra Ruangsvakul is the Head of the Socio-economic Section of the SEAFDEC Training Department in Samut Prakan, Thailand.

