

Participants Laud Regional Training Course on Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries

The rapid depletion of fish stocks is a major challenge for fisheries managers worldwide. Confronting this challenge, the FAO spearheaded a global agreement on the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), which was adopted by member-nations in October 1995.

The Code was hailed as a landmark global initiative in fisheries. But even 13 years after its adoption, the Code has not been properly understood by many stakeholders, especially in developing countries. One reason is the complex phrasing and legalistic language of the Code.

To create awareness among junior and middle-level fisheries officers of member-countries of the BOBP-IGO (Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka), a two-week Regional Training Course on CCRF was organised by the BOBP-IGO from 16 to 27 June 2008 in Chennai and Mumbai, India.

In Mumbai, the Central Institute of Fisheries Education (CIFE), a deemed university, helped conduct the training. Four participants from each country took part.

The course was inaugurated in Chennai on 16 June 2008. Dr Dilip Kumar, Director and Vice-Chancellor, CIFE; Dr V Sampath, Ex-Advisor, Ministry of Earth Sciences; and Dr H Kasim, Principal Scientist and In-charge, Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (Chennai base) took part as guest speakers.

Welcoming participants, Dr Y S Yadava, Director, BOBP-IGO, said the course was in pursuance of the IGO mandate of capacity-building in member-countries.



The Participants at the Regional Training Course on CCRF.

Dr Yadava described the Code as a comprehensive document meant to address fisheries issues in a practical manner. The BOBP-IGO had earlier organised national workshops on the CCRF for senior policy makers of member-countries. The present training course would help build a cadre of middle-level officers conversant with the Code and its Technical Guidelines. He hoped the course would bridge the prevailing knowledge gap on the Code in member-countries.

Dr V Sampath said that though the Code is a voluntary document, it has many references to international laws and conventions and is therefore binding on countries. The Code would facilitate interaction among participants who could learn from one another. He congratulated the BOBP-IGO for organizing the course.

Dr Kasim said the Code provides clear guidelines for fishers on what is expected from them, and for

administrators on how fishers can be made a part of the process of fisheries governance. Citing examples from the field, he said the Code's principles are hardly implemented. Whenever a fisher is asked to curb effort, he agrees, but looks over the shoulder at his neighbour who isn't doing so!

Just as panchayats are now being empowered politically, village-level bodies should be empowered to enforce CCRF, Dr Kasim said. Fishers will then have a greater voice in decision-making. Dr Kasim hoped that in future, such courses would include more participants from member-countries and from other neighboring countries as well.

Dr Dilip Kumar, chief guest of the inaugural session, said that the course could help take the Code to the grassroots through middle-level and junior fisheries officials of member-countries. He said the Code is comprehensive, and every country can adapt the Code to its own needs.

The CIFE was happy to partner the BOBP-IGO in conducting the course. He hoped the partnership and the experience would lead to even better courses in future.

The pedagogical session of the course began with a lecture by Dr Yadava on the BOBP-IGO, its mandate, role, objectives and programmes. He discussed the transformation of the BOBP to an Inter-Governmental Organisation and its role in promoting sustainable fisheries in member-countries.

Dr Sampath then provided a 'historical overview' of various fisheries management approaches in the Bay of Bengal region. He discussed the evolution of fisheries management in the Bay and the transformation of focus from economic growth to sustainability.

Day 2 began with a lecture by Dr Yadava on the CCRF, its nature and scope. Describing the Code and its 12 Articles, Dr Yadava said the Code takes into account all aspects of fisheries. He cited examples of various activities in member-countries that in effect exemplify the Code. But it should be adapted better to the requirements of member-countries and involve all stakeholders.

Dr Sampath discussed the "International Plan of Action (IPOA) for reducing incidental catch of seabirds in longline fisheries and conservation of shark". He said that on the basis of IPOA, states were required to start implementing 'national plans' no later than 2001. He urged BOBP-IGO member-countries to start preparing national plans at the earliest.

Dr Yadava presented the "International Plan of Action on management of fishing capacity and to prevent, deter and eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing". He said the first part of the IPOA called on countries and regional fisheries organizations to achieve efficient, equitable, and transparent management of fishing capacity worldwide by 2005. The

second part – on IUU fishing – is a practical and action-oriented 'toolbox' of measures which states can use to act either directly or through regional fisheries organizations.

Mr Rajdeep Mukherjee (BOBP-IGO) discussed the Code's Technical Guidelines. He said 10 guidelines and supplements had been published so far by the FAO. They are meant to help formulation of an action plan to implement the Code. Mr Mukherjee said that in fisheries management, differentiating the actual cause of the problem from the apparent causes is a key.

Mr Rathin Roy (former BOBP staff) spoke on "Coming together to manage fisheries". He explained the importance of co-operative action by all stakeholders in implementing the Code, and urged that action should focus not merely on fisheries management but also on fisheries governance.

Ms Chandrika Sharma (International Collective in Support of Fishworkers) discussed the 'gender perspective' in taking the Code to the grassroots. She said that the earnings of fisherwomen go directly into family well-being, into food and education. Hence the inclusion of women in fisheries objectives is a must. She highlighted the poor working conditions at landing centres – particularly their sanitation and the facilities for crèches – and called for a determined effort to improve them.

Field visits

Field trips were organized on Day 3 of the course, beginning with a stakeholder meeting in Chinna Neelankarai, a small fishing village on the outskirts of Chennai, in Kancheepuram district.

The Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine), of the district, coordinated the visit. Course participants visited the berthing places of FRP boats on the beach and talked to fishers about fishing areas, the condition of their craft and gear, the catch

composition, etc. They then met 21 traditional fishermen from five neighboring villages at the village community hall.

Course participants asked fishers whether they knew about the Code and its provisions on fishing operations, safety at sea, the role of women in fisheries. How could the Code be implemented better?

Fisher representatives said some of them had read the Tamil translation of the Code and talked about it with others. Most of them accepted the Code's principles and complied with rules and regulations on matters like registration and licensing of boats. However, they were concerned about decline in resources, increase in the number of boats and use of small mesh sizes by other groups of fishers. Other points: Trawling is hurting their livelihoods. Vessel-shore communication facilities, essential for safety at sea, are poor. Women are active in fish marketing and dry fish making.

Responding to queries from course trainees, the fishers said that village panchayats help mitigate conflicts among mechanized and non-mechanized fishers. But the fishers expect the government to implement regulations better and to improve infrastructure such as fish landing centres. Fishers on their part have constructed artificial reefs to improve fish habitats; they expect the government to supplement their efforts. Course trainees thanked the fishers for their time and insights.

On the fourth day, trainees visited the fishing harbour at Puducherry, where the Deputy Director of Fisheries explained basic facilities set up there (such as berthing for 110 mechanized boats and 110 motorized boats). The trainees then visited another fishing village, Solai Thandavan Kuppam, where they were welcomed with shawls by the fisher community.

The fisher community expressed serious concern about purse-seining and trawling in their village, major causes for resource depletion. They



Participants interacting with the fisher community in Chinna Neelankarai, Chennai.

said purse-seining should be banned in Puduchery, as had been done in Tamil Nadu.

The fishers were aware of the CCRF and its guidelines. They followed rules and regulations on boat registration and display of the registration number. They said they adhered to safety requirements on boat maintenance, ascertaining weather conditions before fishing trips, carrying enough drinking water, food, extra fuel, tools, rope, anchor, torch light, sails, etc.

The fishers said the president of their village committee was authorized to deal with conflicts. They felt that rules and regulations ought to be adapted to local conditions. They wanted better communication facilities and life saving equipment. They also wanted short-term training courses on engine maintenance and sea safety.

Course moves to CIFE, Mumbai

The CIFE part of the course began on 20 June in Mumbai. Dr Latha Shenoy, senior scientist and course co-coordinator, welcomed the participants and introduced faculty and participants to one another.

Director Dilip Kumar said that while fisheries is a state subject in India, the central government has set up a strong R & D infrastructure, through eight institutions covering marine and inland fisheries and aquaculture. They function under the aegis of the Indian Council of Agriculture Research. CIFE is the

only institute that encompasses all three areas.

Dr Kumar said that better links were needed between R & D and the field. The fruits of research ought to reach fishers more effectively, and fisher problems addressed better by research interventions. He hoped that the course trainees would interact with CIFE faculty on all fisheries matters.

Dr Yadava said that promoting the CCRF was a major capacity-building activity of the BOBP-IGO. About the training course, he said its three modules related to a historical overview of fisheries management; lectures on various aspects of the Code plus field visits and interaction with fishers; and group discussion and course evaluation.

Dr Dilip Kumar began the pedagogy session of the course with a presentation on the CIFE. He described the institution's achievements and its vision of becoming a global player for specialized HRD in fisheries. Discussing "Co-management of marine fisheries resources" Dr P S Ananthan described the different co-management regimes, with examples from BOBP-IGO member-countries as well as Japan.

Dr R S Biradar explained "Cost effective approaches for collection, compilation and dissemination of fisheries information". He said that while techno-economic and

biological data on fisheries is essential, the nature of fisheries resources makes data collection through a census difficult. He discussed the scope and methodology of sampling processes to collect data, and stressed the importance of training in reliable fishery statistics.

In his lecture on "Integration of fisheries into coastal area management", Dr C S Purshothaman said that coastal zone management includes conflict management among stakeholders. Stakeholder consultations are therefore essential. He referred to the Indian Supreme Court's intervention on coastal aquaculture and the success of integrated coastal zone management practices in Kung Krabaen Bay, eastern Thailand.

Dr Latha Shenoy discussed adaptation of the CCRF to the grassroots. She said that since the Code is voluntary, it requires participation by all stakeholders. Since it is global, it has to be modified for adaptation to local conditions. She discussed the relative merits of different ways to disseminate the Code.

On 21 June 2008, course trainees met 30 members of the Versova Fisheries Co-operative Society at Versova fishing village, which is located close to CIFE on a creek. More than 380 mechanized vessels (ranging from 5m to 15.5 m) operate from the village, which has four fisheries cooperative societies.

Members of the Cooperative complained about discharge of untreated city sewage into the sea and destruction of mangroves for development. They said they follow government regulations on matters like vessel registration, mesh size and fishing bans; but such regulations are often inappropriate and should be modified.

About controlling fishing effort, the members said the government should follow the rule 'one fisher one boat'; often it grants licenses to rich boat owners who already have a

boat. The members described lack of alternative livelihoods as a major problem. Better education and training would give them more options and reduce pressure on resources.

Group discussion

Group discussion followed the field visit, with the course trainees divided into four groups. Each group included a member from each country. Topics identified for group discussions:

- Taking CCRF to the grassroots;
- Role of stakeholders and modalities/ mechanisms of their participation in implementation of the Code;
- Alignment of policies and programmes to meet the requirements of implementation of CCRF;
- Adaptation of the CCRF to meet the local requirement.

The groups presented their findings during an interactive session on the morning of 23 June in which CIFE faculty participated. They also discussed policy issues.

At the concluding session, Dr Dilip Kumar hoped the course would benefit participants and their countries in implementing the Code at the grassroots level. He urged participants to put their learning to good use and promote sustainable fisheries. Dr Latha Shenoy thanked the BOBP-IGO for choosing CIFE as partner and said the course was an enriching experience. The trainees returned to Chennai on 23 June 2008.

Final session of the course in Chennai, 24 June 2008

The session began with the course trainees sharing their experiences of the field visits and course work at Chinna Neelankarai, Puducherry and Mumbai. They said the field visits gave them a better understanding of ground realities and of the views and roles of stakeholders in resource management.

A second group discussion ensued, with the groups this time arranged by country. They assessed



Participants visiting a fish landing site in Tamil Nadu, India.

implementation of the Code in their respective countries and how it could be adapted to meet local requirements. The four focus areas were the same as in the earlier group discussion.

On the basis of discussions carried out for almost two full days, a representative from each country made a presentation on 27 June.

Major observations are summarized below:

- A wide knowledge gap exists among stakeholders about responsible fishing practices and the Code;
- Participation of other stakeholders in fisheries management is limited but gradually increasing;
- There is a communication gap between the government including R & D institutes and other stakeholders;
- The Code is more acceptable and easier to understand when translated into local languages or presented through posters; and
- Fishers are concerned about resource depletion and are eager to play a responsible role.

Some important suggestions that emerged from the group discussions:

- For effective dissemination of the Code, education and training are important tools.
- Mass media like TV and radio can be significant channels of dissemination. Since many fishers are familiar with mobile phones, Short Message Service (SMS)

could be used as a delivery tool. Messages could also be disseminated through prayer services in places of worship.

- Alternative income-generation activities and vocational skills should be popularized among fishers.

Concluding ceremony

The concluding ceremony of the training course was held in the library hall of the BOBP-IGO Secretariat on 27 June 2008. Certificates were presented to participants.

Dr Yadava said the regional training course had been an enriching experience for the BOBP-IGO. The group discussions, presentations, and course evaluation by the participants would help the BOBP-IGO fine-tune future courses. They would also help the IGO's strategies for member-countries to adapt and implement the Code.

Dr Yadava asked the trainees to cultivate relationships formed during the course. They should continue to communicate with each other and with the BOBP-IGO, so that a fisheries network was established in the region. The trainees thanked the BOBP-IGO and CIFE, Mumbai, for the excellent conduct of the course and the warm hospitality. They assured the IGO that they would use the knowledge acquired during the course to promote and strengthen the CCRF in their respective countries.