

Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries

Taking it far and wide



Reflections on the Code of Conduct – 12 years after its creation.

In October 2007, the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) will be 12 years old. It's time for an objective assessment of its impact.

How well-known or widely known is the Code? How do we adapt it to meet regional and national requirements? How do we take it to the grassroots, where it matters most? How do we ensure and monitor compliance with its principles and practices – by governments, by fisherfolk?

Most fisheries officials perhaps know about something called the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. But its penetration to the grassroots has been dismal. In some

places, copies of the Code and its technical guidelines have been made available in the vernacular. But there has been little effort to promote or catalyse debate and discussion among fisher communities about the meaning of the Code and its technical guidelines and their implementation.

The Code is a set of principles, conventions and standards relating to various aspects of fisheries. Here is an assortment of comments, criticisms and insights relating to implementation of the Code.

Improve information about the Code, and disseminate it better

Simple print literature is perhaps the first step in documenting the Code.

The short and simplified version of the Code brought out by the FAO was excellent in this context, and helped awareness-raising among fisheries officials and scientists.

Vernacular translations of the Code are essential. BOBP has helped translate the Code into several Indian languages, also into Sinhala, Divehi and Bangla. However, more innovative and interactive tools of communication need to be tapped to make an impact on fisherfolk.

Examples: comics, street plays, beach meetings, video films, posters, pamphlets (which could even be distributed at public places in coastal areas such as bus stands and cinema halls). Plus

radio programmes for fishers out at sea.

The FAO has created a special window through FISHCODE to assist member-countries to implement the Code and its Technical Guidelines. Greater support for FISHCODE would strengthen FAO's hands for implementation of the CCRF.

At the local level, frequent brainstorming workshops with fishers – at district headquarters and fishing villages – would lead to better understanding of fishers' problems and possible solutions.

Catch 'em young

At the one-day consultation with fishers of Tamil Nadu (pages 24-28), it was suggested that the Code of Conduct should be made a part of the school curriculum.

A special syllabus or a supplementary school programme could be considered for coastal areas, with a focus on fisheries. The fundamentals of conservation, management and responsible fisheries could be taught in an interesting way. This is already being done in the Maldives, and its experience could be of interest to



other countries in the region and elsewhere in similar settings.

Fisheries educational institutions in the region ought to be mobilized to improve awareness of the Code of Conduct. CCRF could be a subject of specialization. A core of specialists on the subject would enable a build-up of knowledge and expertise.

Ensure political support for implementation

There may be no political opposition to the Code and its implementation. But the Code – like fisheries itself – may suffer from malign neglect, from low priority. It is up to fishers, fisher bodies and fisheries departments to lobby support from decision-makers on

the Code, and on ways to operationalise it.

Responsible fisheries isn't attained by a Code alone

Codes and conventions cannot on their own lead to responsible fisheries.

A fisheries regime that is fair and equitable to all will prevent illwill and strife among different stakeholders, and replace confrontation by co-operation.

This means a whole set of policies and actions to address the concerns of fishers and improve livelihoods.

At the one-day consultation with fishers, fishers said the most important messages they picked up from the Code related, in order of priority, were fisheries management, fishing operations, post-harvest technology, education and training, sea safety, communication and conservation. This is revealing.

Resource education, conservation and management

Fishers are aware of the dangers of overfishing. But they need education and orientation on resource depletion trends and patterns, on fish behaviour, on management methods and tools.



This means mobilizing resource specialists and fishery scientists in a concerted campaign to educate fishers – a matter for governments and international agencies to consider.

Every department of fisheries needs a resource management wing. A uniform ban on fishing during monsoon months needs to be introduced. Resource enhancement programmes such as artificial reefs and ranching, should be promoted and popularized.

The subsidiarity principle, which takes management to the lowest management level to encourage participation, should be encouraged.

Model legislation on the Code should be introduced after careful study on aspects of the CCRF that are appropriate for the purpose.

Fishing capacity should be systematically monitored to ensure sustainability. Ensuring the co-operation of fishing communities in this task would be a great help. The practice of multi-agency registration of fishing vessels should be ended.

Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) is the most effective management strategy, since the fishers themselves take vigorous part in management, even initiate it, and monitor it. However, CBFM cannot materialize overnight.

Co-management – the practice of government working together with fisherfolk to manage the resource – is a useful first step.

BOBP-IGO has been involved, along with the International Co-operative Alliance, in promoting community-based fishery resource management in Asian countries. Funded by Japan, the project brings experts to an Asian country; select fishers and fishery officials from that country do a study tour of Japan. A workshop is then held in the Asian country. Philippines was the focus of this project during 2006-07. The project's experiences and findings are of interest to CBFM and co-management in all countries of the region.



Plug those information gaps

The connection between development and data (or information) is obvious, but a strong disconnect between the two characterizes fisheries in most developing countries. Gaps in fisheries data should be plugged, to enable better analysis and decision-making. Involving fishers in data collection may lead to more reliable data.

Rationalise governance

The point has been made many times in many contexts, but bears repetition. All fisheries matters in India, now scattered among a slew of Ministries and departments, need to be brought under a single administrative umbrella. Likewise, fisheries administration in other countries too, needs rationalization.

Institution-strengthening and capacity-building in fisheries, essential by themselves, would also help strengthen implementation of the CCRF. This is an ongoing and long-term process. Governments in the region must study needs in this area and methods to bring it about, with perhaps assistance from the FAO and international agencies.

In 2005, the FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI) at its 26th session, called for a "decade of implementation" for international fisheries instruments. A special year of implementation for the CCRF may help accelerate awareness, compliance and problem-shooting.

The Code of Conduct took many years, marathon effort, formidable expertise and substantial resources to develop. It deserves substantial effort now to further the purpose for which it was created. All stakeholders need to join in this effort, for the benefit of fishers and fisheries, and for humankind as a whole.

– Y S Yadava

Paintings by school children in India, Maldives and Sri Lanka depicting post-tsunami reconstruction.