

Taking the Code to the Grassroots

Report of a one-day consultation with stakeholders, including fisher communities of Tamil Nadu, on the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries

It was both substantive and productive. And for once, fishers held the stage. It was wonderful to see fishers from Chennai and other parts of Tamil Nadu speaking with flair and feeling on matters that affect them most – fisheries and their livelihoods.

The date: June 29, 2007. The occasion: a one-day consultation in Chennai with fishers, NGO representatives, government officials, and other stakeholders. Subject: The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and its implementation in Tamil Nadu. Organiser: The BOBP-IGO. Highlight: Release of Tamil-language versions of the Technical Guidelines on Marine Fisheries relating to the Code of Conduct. Participation: nearly 50 persons, including some 35 fishers.

Dr Y S Yadava, Director, BOBP-IGO, welcomed the gathering. In his inaugural address, Mr Ajay Bhattacharya, Joint Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture, urged the Government of Tamil Nadu to ensure that the fishing community reaped tangible benefits from implementation of the Code of Conduct.

Mr Bhattacharya pointed out that fishing areas and fishery resources are limited. While marine fish production has remained constant during the past decade, the number of fishers and fishing boats has gone up alarmingly, and fishers' incomes have gone down. Result: fishermen have taken to fishing with nets of smaller mesh sizes. The Technical Guidelines of the Code of Conduct translated into Tamil by



Mr Ajay Bhattacharya (right), releasing the Tamil version of the Technical Guidelines on Marine Fisheries relating to the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

the BOBP-IGO would enlarge understanding of the Guidelines and induce better awareness among fishermen.

In a Power Point presentation, Dr Yadava introduced the Code of Conduct and explained the specific aims of the many Technical Guidelines relating to the Code, which were now being made available in Tamil.

Dr S Vijaykumar, Tamil Nadu's Director of Fisheries, detailed the government's schemes for the welfare of fishing communities. Examples:

- Sea ranching of shrimps (*Penaeus monodon*). As many as 45.5 million seed at a cost of Rs 1.35 crores have already been released. Fishers say the shrimp population in inshore areas has gone up as a result. Such ranching will help rejuvenate shrimp stocks.
- The Government does not permit shrimp farming in

mangrove areas. A seasonal ban on mechanized fishing has been in force during the past few years. (The ban is from April 15 to May 29 on the east coast of Tamil Nadu, June 15 to July 31 on the west coast. During this period, diesel is not supplied to boats. Fishermen have been co-operating with the ban order.)

- Fishing harbour management committees have been constituted to maintain fishing harbours in the State as per international standards. The Department of Fisheries (DOF) recently conducted a two-day workshop with stakeholders on proper management of fishing harbours and fish landing centers (FLCs). The Department will soon bring out a manual for management of fishing harbours and FLCs, a draft is ready.
- To enhance fish resources, the DOF has taken up a programme

on artificial reefs (ARs) with the help of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) and the Tamil Nadu Fisheries Co-operative Federation. The Department has implemented this scheme in 10 places during the past three years. Fishermen have reported an increase in fish biomass from areas where the reefs are located. The CMFRI is now trying to involve local NGOs in this programme. The Department has given fishers solar dryers, and trained them to reduce fish spoilage.

- Other activities: promotion of tuna fishing to reduce pressure on inshore areas and encourage diversification; setting up of the Fishermen Welfare Board and Fisheries Advisory Committees; welfare schemes such as housing, insurance and saving-cum-relief; strengthening of fisheries research and statistics; a ban on the fishing of endangered species such as sea horses and chanks; a ban on pair trawling to conserve resources.

Dr Vijaykumar said the DOF would like mesh size regulations to curb juvenile fishing to be enforced at the manufacturing stage itself – by the manufacturing units.

Dr Vijaykumar said that a project on development of fisheries policy in Tamil Nadu, to be funded by the World Bank and executed by the FAO, would commence soon. The project could be a role model for other states too. The State Government would also receive Rs 12 crores from Japan under a World Bank Project to set up a modern fish processing complex.

The DOF has set up a ‘Touch Screen’ system, with the help of the Electronic Corporation of Tamil Nadu (ELCOT). (Just touch the screen with a pen or pencil to get highlighted information on various aspects of fisheries.) The DOF is also trying to provide fishers with seamless communication units,

which will be equipped with an inbuilt Global Positioning System.

Dr Vijaykumar said that 90 per cent of the boats in Tamil Nadu are now registered. Such registration, and display of registration numbers on boats, is compulsory. Life jackets are being provided to fishers, also subsidies for ice boxes and nets. 360° lanterns will be given to fishers to ensure their safety during night fishing.

Dr Vijaykumar said the DOF had imposed a fine on fishing boats straying across the India-Sri Lanka international border, but this order had been stayed by a court. Assistance for sales tax exemption had been given to boats registered *before* the Tenth Five Year Plan. Similar assistance for boats registered *during* the latter period had been requested from the Ministry of Agriculture.

Following Dr Vijaykumar’s detailed overview, the fishing community expressed its views frankly – not just about the Code but about all aspects of small-scale fisheries and their livelihoods. Their remarks and suggestions, and those of other participants, have been grouped under six major heads.

(i) Popularizing and raising awareness about the Code of Conduct

1. Hold grassroots-level meetings regularly with stakeholders.
2. Create and raise awareness about the Code through street meetings, beach meetings, theatre, street plays, folk songs, cultural programmes. Involve

community leaders and the media in these meetings.

3. Popularize the Code in villages through TV, ads and pamphlets in public places like bus stands and cinema halls (especially in coastal areas), and slide shows on conservation.
 4. Make the Code of Conduct a part of the school curriculum, so that children learn early about conservation and sustainable fishing methods. Use signboards to teach students.
 5. Conduct meetings at district/ taluk/ village level to create awareness.
 6. Send fishers abroad, particularly to other developing countries, so that they learn about developments there.
 7. Inform fishers about the depletion of shark fisheries, about how birds are being caught by longlines.
 8. Organizations like Fishery Survey of India (FSI) should contact local leaders and through them hold meetings with fishers.
 9. Distribute copies of the Technical Guidelines far and wide.
- (ii) Pollution control**
10. Stop water pollution in Tuticorin caused by fly ash from the thermal plant.
 11. Stop the release of chemicals into the waters by other industries in Tuticorin, and the discharge of industrial and thermal effluents into the sea.

The Tamil language versions of the Technical Guidelines on Marine Fisheries.



All this is depleting fishery resources and affecting fish breeding. It is even affecting the health of the community.

12. Stop the excessive catch of juveniles.
13. Combat the effects of the atomic power plant, which is affecting marine resources.
14. Too many prawn farms. They are harming fishery resources through release of untreated farm effluents and chemicals. Check and monitor such farms.
15. Put an end to prawn farming in mangrove areas.

(iii) Regulation of gear and mesh size

16. Stop purse-seine operations. They are catching small-sized fishes and are impairing fisheries as a whole.
17. Ban trawling, it is disturbing the eco-system.
18. Permit pair trawling with increased mesh size.
19. Put an end to irresponsible fishing and catches of juveniles. Traditional fishermen are doing this, through methods like purse-seining, mechanized fishermen through small mesh sizes. The government is not tackling the problem.
20. Ban dynamite fishing.
21. Introduce mesh-size control.
22. Stop the use of machine-made nets or regulate mesh sizes of manufacturing nets at the factory itself – it is depleting fishery resources.
23. Hook and line and gill nets are the best gear for fishing. 60 mm mesh size should be used for nylon nets, 120 mm for HDP.
24. Nets of small-mesh size should not be manufactured at all. Cotton nets are good for the fishery.

(iv) Safety at Sea

25. Insure FRP boats.
26. An appeal to the Coast Guard – don't frighten fishermen.

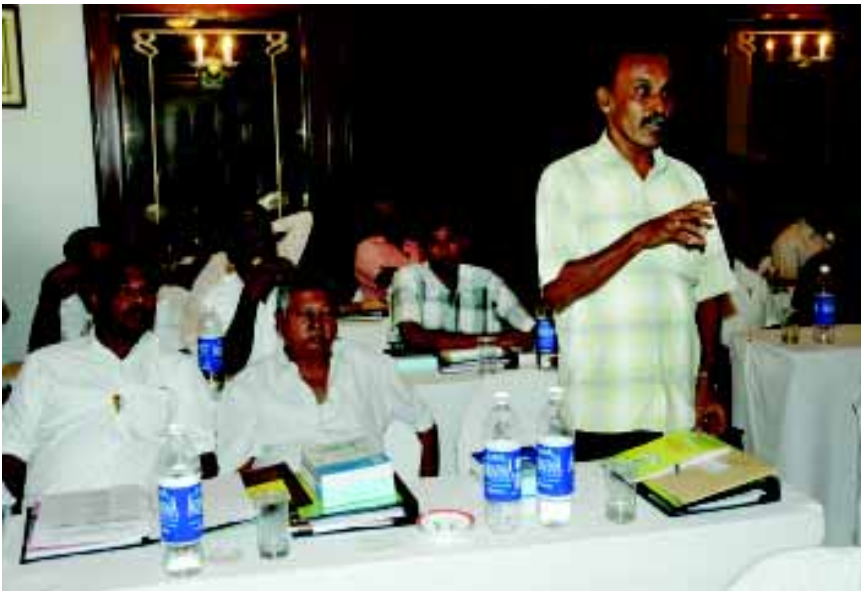


(v) General conservation measures

27. Undertake sea ranching all along the coastline. Done in a few areas, it will not be very beneficial.
28. Implement all acts and rules strictly.
29. Address the problem of fish discards at sea.
30. Fix the quantity of fish to be captured. When a fish ban is in force in Tamil Nadu during the monsoon, Kerala fishers come to Kanyakumari for fishing. Impose a strict ban on fishing for 60 days.
31. Consult all fisher representatives about mesh size before amending the 1983 Acts.
32. The ranching programmes of Tamil Nadu fisheries – a very good initiative. Fishermen should be allowed to take active part in the programme.
33. Create awareness among fishers who have been depleting fishing resources through wrong fishing methods – both mechanized and traditional fishermen are offenders.
34. Police and village committees should regulate fishing. The Government and the Gulf of Mannar protection committee should work together to implement the law and prevent any fishing in the Gulf of Mannar biosphere.
35. Curb poaching of our resources by foreign vessels. Curb poaching in Tamil Nadu by fishermen from neighbouring states.
36. Stop the fishing of juveniles and small fishes.
37. Divide the fishing ban period on the east coast into two periods – one in April, another in September.
38. Introduce a system whereby country craft can fish for four days a week and mechanized boats for three days. This will help conservation.
39. Introduce a token system for sale of diesel to mechanized boats on the basis of criteria such as vessel size, fishing area and number of crew. This will help regulation and monitoring by the authorities and prevent misuse of diesel purchase.
40. Encourage community-based fisheries management.
41. Address the impact of the Sethu Samudaram project on fishery resources.

(vi) Government support

42. Subsidize the kerosene used in OBMs. Extend diesel subsidy to traditional craft.
43. Construct exclusive fish landing centers for traditional



craft. Improve the conditions of all fish landing centers.

44. Provide financial assistance for deep sea fishing.
45. Diesel makes fishing uneconomical. It takes up 70 percent of the expense of mechanized boat fishing. Develop fuel alternatives like gas conversion, etc.
46. Provide subsidies for kattumaram fishing.
47. Provide assistance for FRP boats and diesel, and insurance for these boats.
48. Mr Saravanan of DHAN Foundation, Chennai, said his organization carried out several extension and awareness programmes and had started a number of IT centers in villages. Literature published by BOBP-IGO, including the Technical Guidelines of the Code, could be uploaded on the website of the DHAN Foundation, so that users of the IT Centres could access them. He asked for a set of CDs of the Technical Guidelines. Mr Saravanan said that existing traditional knowledge in fisheries, which was considerable, should be tapped for resource conservation. The Code of Conduct could be incorporated in traditional fishing practices.

49. Mr C M Muralidharan, FAO Consultant, United Nations Tsunami Recovery Support Project, referred to the catch of juveniles by fishers using small-mesh sized nets. He suggested that controls on such gear be introduced at the manufacturing end. Likewise, marketing controls would put an end to the trade in juveniles. Policy should be formulated in consultation with stakeholders at different levels. He said the study on the use of the token system for diesel purchase in Palk Bay could help reduce fishing pressure by trawlers. The study was being carried out by the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies with assistance from Netherlands.
50. Dr H Kasim, Principal Scientist, Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), discussed implementation of the Code in Tamil Nadu. He said that fishermen should exercise self-control and avoid overfishing, they should realize its repercussions. Institutions like the CMFRI and the FSI were willing to extend the results of their scientific research; fishers should invite the experts to their villages for meetings. He said the 45-day ban on mechanized fishing in the east

coast (April-May) and the west coast (July-August) is helping conservation by reducing fishing effort.

51. Deputy Commandant Anupam Rai of the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), Chennai said that the ICG interacts regularly with the fisher community, especially on safety at sea. He would inform the ICG headquarters about the publication of the Technical Guidelines, which would be very useful. He said that the emergency contact No 1718 for distress at sea is now supported by telecom service providers such as VSNL & BSNL. The ICG is also getting the six-digit number 155211 changed to 1554, a number already in use in Saurashtra.

He said the ICG is working with the Indian Space Research Organisation on communication aspects; it is interacting with Bharat Heavy Electronics Limited (BHEL) for the manufacture of low-cost EPIRBs (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons), and with Antariksh/ Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) on a low-cost Vessel Monitoring System (VMS). A VMS hub is being set up in Porbandar, Gujarat. So far 15 EPIRBs have been set up on boats on a trial basis. The ICG is also working with mobile companies for setting up a distress alert system.

Mr Rai requested fishers to be accurate while reporting fishers missing at sea. The ICG should be given regular updates on the status of a missing boat, say every eight or 10 hours. He said fishers don't seem to bother much about safety. They don't carry life jackets, and don't wear them even if they have one.

He said the sea-worthiness of fishing vessels constructed after the tsunami was questionable. He complained that some

fishers operate close to data buoys and damage the equipment – the ICG has received some complaints on the issue from the National Institute of Ocean Technology. Fishing close to data buoys and oil rigs should be avoided. In fact, fishing was prohibited within a range of 1 000 meters from oil rigs. Many boats did not bear clear registration numbers. In conclusion, he urged the fishing community to give the ICG information on what was happening at sea, it would serve as intelligence support.

52. Mr P Sivaraj, Zonal Director, FSI, described the awareness campaigns carried out by his organization on safety at sea, including popularization of the Code of Conduct. A meeting on sea safety was held recently at Marakkanam, and provisions of the Code were explained to fishers.
53. Mr R Ravikumar, Regional Coordinator, FAO Safety at Sea Project, said he was most impressed by the views of

fishers at the consultation. Their participation was necessary for policy-making, and should be encouraged at the stage of policy formulation as well as implementation. He referred to Article 6 and Articles 8 and 8.25 of the Code, which concern safety at sea.

54. Mr Muthuswamy, Joint Director of Fisheries, Tamil Nadu, said that while issuing tokens to mechanized boats for supply of diesel, the authorities concerned should ensure that various requirements – such as registration, insurance, etc – were complied with. Mesh sizes should be controlled to prevent catch of juveniles. The Code of Conduct and its Technical Guidelines should be presented in more simple form, such as comic books. Village administrative committees should be utilized for popularizing the Code, and in general for implementing rules and regulations.

Conclusion

Fisher-participants said the consultation was very useful and

would help more effective rehabilitation of fishers. The work initiated by the consultation should continue. In fact, more such consultations should be organised.

Many fishers said that the tsunami was a calamity but an opportunity as well. New programmes for fishers should be considered. The tsunami has brought about a situation where there are no labourers any more; those who never owned boats now do. It has been a great social leveler, and given many poor fishermen rich opportunities. These should be put to good use to bring about a better society.

In concluding remarks, Mr Bhattacharya said that the recent marine census conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture provided a good idea of the size of our fishing fleet. Marine fish production has remained constant for many years, it should be developed sustainably. He requested the Tamil Nadu Government to do what it could to implement the Code and its guidelines.

Dr Y S Yadava proposed a vote of thanks.

