

**Keynote Speech**  
**By**  
**Dr. Plodprasop Suraswadi**  
**Advisor to the Prime Minister**  
**at the Global Conference on Small-scale Fisheries**  
**14 October 2008 at 9.30 hrs.**  
**Sofitel Centara Grand, Bangkok**

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**Permanent Secretary, of Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives of Thailand,  
Director-General of the Department of Fisheries,  
Assistant Director General of FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific,  
SEAFDEC Secretary General  
Worldfish Center Director,  
Distinguished participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**I am indeed honored to have this opportunity to deliver this keynote speech to a large and knowledgeable audience such as this. The organizers of this Conference deserve to be congratulated for their insights and timely action in addressing the small-scale fisheries. I am thankful to them for bringing together the serious stakeholders to share knowledge and experiences from around the world with only one common goal—to help the large number of small people who have been long neglected by the modern fisheries management. With my life-long commitments to the effective fisheries management, aiming at the prosperity and happiness of my fellow compatriots, and my country, I shall attempt to outline my thoughts on the matter that may be further discussed during the next four days.**

**/As a fishery scientist,...**

**As a fishery scientist, turning administrator and lately a politician, I wish to share with you my emerging perception on the management of small-scale fisheries.**

**The estimated 51 million fishermen in the world include as many as 50 million small-scale fishermen. These small people fish primarily to feed themselves. What left from a successful fishing trip are processed and preserved for future consumption. They sometimes trade the surplus to earn additional income to pay for other necessities in life.**

**We talk about the small-scale fishermen not as an individual, but as a family. Their wives and children actively participate in the fishing, processing and trading activities. The whole family shares the various responsibilities, knowing who are good at what. No labor in the family is left idle or wasted as they live from hands to mouths. I am saying this from my admiration of their efficiencies and intra-family cooperation, not in the way people normally speak of the unfortunate poor. With their direct dependence on the natural resources, they are readily identified with what we widely recognized as “the grassroots.” Their large number naturally makes them “the majority” that no manager, public administrator, or politician can afford to ignore.**

**You all know that the country is made up by the mass. In all political systems, some sort of equity must be maintained in order that the participation in development by every citizen can be**

**/ maximized. ...**

**maximized. Under our political system of ‘constitutional monarchy,’ we care for all our people, particularly the poor and the grassroots, as they are the majority. A chunk of the annual development budget aiming at ‘enabling’ of these people is highly justifiable. Together with other forms of assistance, the government development programs needs to bring the people at the grassroots, including the small-scale fishermen and their families, at par with the rest of the society. I believe we all value highly the physical wealth of the country; however, it takes equity among the citizens to ensure the sustainability of the wealth and the progress.**

**Among us, we are well aware of the methods how to enable our poor fellowmen. The conventional fisheries management that we have practiced is largely flawed for it focused on the fish resources and ignores the resource users. The conventional management seeks to control the fishermen and other resource users by a legal means, not by appreciating their potentials, their capabilities, and commitments. We all know what the end result of such the management. The widespread degradation of marine physical and living resources and the worsening conflicts among the resource users have served as the testimony of a management failure. Should we learn from our past mistakes, we shall be more than willing to take up a more promising management option. Where this is the case, I would like to recommend the ‘people focused strategy.**

**/ Involving the grassroots ....**

**Involving the grassroots as a partner in development should take a broader perspective than what the conventional fisheries management used to provide. We may seek to correct our past weaknesses by using the strengths of our new partners. The large number of fishermen, their lifelong commitments to the sustenance of fishery resources, their familiarity with the fishing ground and its ecosystem are the assets in management, just to name a few. Many parts of the world have experimented successfully with the various management methods, such as co-management, user-rights, and ecosystem approach. However, you will agree with me that the refinement of the conventional fisheries management system with any of these new management methods would require a strong political will.**

**Politics is the process by which groups of people make decision. It consists of social relations involving authority or power. The authority is derived from tradition, charismatic, and legal sources. We continue adhere to our tradition and support it for we need to preserve the existing values, our pride, including the desire to maintain status quo. The personal charm or the strength of an individual personality is another source of authority that we normally seek in our leader. The legal system also provides us with authority, such as the office that one holds.**

**/Before ending my speech,...**

**Before ending my speech, I would like to emphasize here that the small-scale fisheries connotes a very large group of people who cherish and hold different economic, social and traditional values. Their subsistent fishing has already formed a solid economic and social base. Their success, either by their own or with our support, will expand this socio-economic base further. As their partners (and not patrons), the different management agencies need to understand their natural capacities. Where weaknesses exist, we can make efforts to strengthen them. Whatever we do, we should not forget that they are our partners in development. We should treat them as our partners, not as clients.**

**Thank you.**

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