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Theme 2: Securing post-harvest benefits

The role of cooperatives and other organizational forms.

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Participants in the discussion represented fisheries cooperatives, governments and civil society.

It was acknowledged that use of the phrase “cooperative” for historical reasons had a negative perception in many communities and it was encouraged to find another general accepted term for discussions in the future.

The group recognized that post harvest losses caused by discards normally is a minor problem in small scale fishery since most of the catch is utilized. Because discard is dealt with by another group, this group focused on the cooperatives means to reduce other post-harvest losses.

It was generally accepted by the group that formation of cooperatives could improve the resilience and stability of the community and specifically the negotiation power in relation to prices, market stability, post harvest facilities, education and market logistics.

1. There seems to be a world wide frustration on middlemen earning the largest benefit from the catches, but some places the middlemen were an integrated and accepted part of the fishing community. In other areas the fish buyers come from outside the fishing community and control the prices on an unacceptable low level. In this last situation the cooperative structure could either create competition among buyers (more fish and/or auctions would attract more buyers), or some links in the fish trader chain could be cut (i.e. community arranged transport of fish products to larger markets). It was realized that the first model often was the most feasible since the buyers mostly had a better knowledge on the market than the fishing community, and cutting out links occasionally lead to instability.
2. A vital advantage of the cooperative structure is the possibility to invest in facilities to reduce post-harvest losses like ice-plants and fish processing installations. In addition the easier access to group training on maintenance of equipment and value adding of the catch was emphasized.
3. Access roads to landing sites could be negotiated by a cooperative and thus secure access to larger markets. However in some cases the absence of access roads to a mixed community kept the prices of fish and fish products on an artificially high level.
4. Fishing cooperatives would have a stronger negotiating power than the individual fishermen. This is an advantage with bulk purchase of fishing gear,

engines, equipment and fuel but indeed also in political negotiation with government.

5. A common advantage utilized by the cooperative structure is a central grading of the catches which secure sufficient attractive batches for the fish buyers in different quality grades, which should award a better price for better quality fish. However it is a world wide phenomena that better handling and quality that can be promoted by a cooperative does not necessarily lead to a better price, mainly because the consumers are not aware of the differences in quality. Therefore value adding along these lines will imply a consumer quality awareness campaign that might be to big a task for a single cooperative.
6. Women often sell the fish and fish products. There are examples where women fish sellers could not get a steady delivery of fish to sell because all the landings were exported. This happens where the fishermen has no control over the first entry point of their catch, i.e. they are controlled by fish buyers who own their vessels or loan money for vessels and equipment. Cooperatives can easier get bank loans, or micro credits when the cooperative guaranties. Therefore the fishermen in the cooperative have control over the first entry point and will obtain better prices, and the women fish sellers are also guarantied a steady delivery of fish.
7. Many cooperatives imposed by governments have not been viable. It was emphasized that a successful fishing cooperative needed to have internal democracy.