

Ways of creating and enhancing democratic governance and policy spaces for fisher community representation (including women) in decision-making process

Small group discussion on Thursday,
16 October 2008

24 participants from Asia, Africa, Pacific, Europe, North America and the Caribbean, comprised of 7 females and 16 males, got together to discuss on “ways of creating and enhancing democratic governance and policy spaces for fisher community representation (including women) in decision-making process”. Moderator is Susana Siar and Co-Moderator is John Kurien and the rapporteur is Hiromoto Watanabe.

While the time allocated was rather limited, the discussion was very active and some practical examples in Africa and Asia were also provided.

As the title shows, we decided firstly to add “creating” into the scope of the discussion because we should create the policy spaces if there is currently none. And if such space already exists, we then discussed how we should enhance it.

Creation and Enhancement

- Creating process
 - Policy decision
 - Legislation
 - Institution
 - Action Plan
- Speed up the process – soft law (e.g. the Code)
- Bottom-up process
 - Fishers should take initiative!
 - Fishers can engage with government and at the same time engage in partnership with civil society organizations to demand representation

If there is no space for fisher community representation, we should create it.

How?

Creation process

First of all, we need policy decision to create such a space. An example was given from Lake Victoria where a decision made at the regional level created space for the organization of Beach Management Units.

Based on the policy decision, we should establish appropriate legislation, which should be accompanied by mechanisms for effective enforcement.

The legislation leads to institutional framework such as, a fishery policy advisory committee, as a policy space where fisher communities can also raise their voices and elaborate action plans.

Legislations should also be reviewed to determine if there are existing provisions for fisher representations, as the case in many countries.

Facilitation

In order to speed up the process of creation, it was suggested that soft law such as the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries can facilitate the process. So voluntary agreements formulated at the international level can be used to create policy space at the national level.

Bottom-up process

The process should be bottom-up rather top-down. In this context, if there is no policy space available, fishers do not need to wait, but should take initiative to create such space.

Creation and Enhancement

- Representation
 - Elected or appointed
 - Empowerment
 - Monopolization
 - Transparency and accountability
 - Reflection of voices
- Capacity Building
- A role for CSOs
- A role for the media

Even if a policy space, such as a fishery advisory committee, has been already established, it may not necessarily function well. Small-scale fishers are often marginalized and lacks the capacity to participate effectively in decision-making processes. The challenge is how could we facilitate the function and enhance democratic governance where fisher community can be involved fully in decision-making processes.

We allocated substantial time to discuss “representation”. Who has the mandate to speak on behalf of small-scale fisher communities for effective involvement?

While the term “democracy” leads us to consider that a representative should be elected, it was also pointed out that an appropriately appointed representative may serve better than an elected one in some cases. If there is any traditional system to choose a representative in place, such a system should be fully taken account and strengthened. It was generally agreed that a representative may not be necessarily elected, but should have the mandate to represent. It was raised that space should be created for women to be represented, in cases where the cultural context does not enable them to do so.

On the other hand, event if elected (or appointed), the representative may not properly perform as expected, if enough power is not delegated. Empowerment of representation is therefore an essential prerequisite. The representative regardless of gender should be fully recognized as a person who can speak on behalf of the community.

It was pointed out that democracy is similar to a market place in terms of competition and monopolization.. There is some risk that a small number of outspoken people may monopolize the “democratic” process.

The importance of transparency and accountability in governance was highlighted.

To be heard is not sufficient, if the voices raised by representatives are not reflected appropriately into the decision-making processes. Unless the voices are really taken into account in decision making, representation means nothing.

The importance of capacity building of the community, their leaders and representatives was underscored.

In this context, a significant role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) was highlighted in, for example, providing information to government on what is happening in reality on the ground.

The role of the media in generating awareness about the situation prevailing in SSF was also underscored.

Suggestions

- Regional Forum
- Special COFI for SSF

In order to create spaces and processes of real dialogue between policy makers and small-scale fishers, two concrete proposals were suggested:

First is to create a regional forum including all relevant states, agencies and economic institutions where small-scale fishers can have a voice.

Second to organize a special session of the Committee on Fisheries or COFI to discuss specifically on SSF.