

## **Fisheries**

The world's fisheries provide livelihoods to millions of people in coastal regions and contribute significantly to national economies. They are relied upon as a safety net by some of the world's poorest, providing cash income and nutrition, especially during times of financial hardship. Healthy fisheries support the wellbeing of nations, through direct employment in fishing, processing, and ancillary services, as well as through subsistence-based activities (UNEP 2011).

However, overcapacity is currently a big issue and the impact of fisheries collapse can be devastating. If no action is taken, it may result in a major crisis in the future, affecting not only labour but also deepening poverty and food insecurity. Individuals and their families, communities and even entire regions could undergo significant change. This social dimension is so critical that it must be fully integrated with any approach taken to reduce overcapacity or promote more sustainable fishing practices<sup>15</sup>.

While there are instruments that can help respond to the issue of overcapacity, the potential human cost that might result from the implementation of green policies on fisheries cannot be ignored. Policies must be implemented in a manner that also addresses the human dimension. Measures should be accompanied by mechanisms to protect fishers and their families from loss of income and loss of employment opportunities. Likewise, these measures should provide fishers with alternative income sources, preferably within the fish-related value chain that will enable workers and companies to keep working in the same communities. Furthermore, the potential impact of new policies on safety, decent working conditions and sustainability of communities should also be considered.

Whether overcapacity in the fisheries sector is the result of technological improvements, too many vessels, the increased efficiency of vessels or a combination of the above, reducing capacity will have an impact on existing fishing operations. One often suggested approach would be to seek to decommission or otherwise remove from service some of the vessels.

If fishing capacity is reduced, what are the implications for those that work in the fishing industry? There is likely to be a need for income support and for retraining. These solutions, however, may in themselves be insufficient if they do not lead to replacement employment opportunities. The possibilities for fishers to transition to other forms of work will depend on factors outside of the fishing sector itself – for example, the state of the local economy, the transferability of skills and other considerations. The importance of tradition and culture also cannot be neglected. What is being asked is for people to change not simply their occupation, but also their way of life. If change is not successful, it is likely that many fishers may try to return to fishing, whether legally or not. Some fishers may continue to fish, even when they recognize that resources are dwindling, simply because their first priority is to ensure the survival of themselves and their families.

In many fishing communities it is difficult to find work other than employment in the fisheries. Thus, retraining alone may well be insufficient. A successful transition would require a shift in the economy and would require local economic development. To ensure that the voices of the stakeholders are heard, it will be important to strengthen fisher and fishing vessel owner organizations. Furthermore, training on issues related to greening the sector and transitioning to other forms of work should be provided in order to encourage sustainable local economic development and create new, good jobs to replace those lost in the fishing sector. Employment impact assessments can be carried out to analyze “the dynamic-interdependent linkages between the different sectors of the economy and can be used to specifically explore the relationship between intensive employment strategies, job creation, and poverty reduction”.

Without realistic and believable alternatives, fishers (and their political representatives) will resist cutting back capacity. When such discussions take place, it is important that all stakeholders have a chance to make their views known and to receive information on the implications of any new

policies or programmes. To ensure that the voices of the stakeholders are heard, it will be important to strengthen fishers and fishing vessel owner organizations, and specifically to provide training on issues related to greening the sector, transitioning to other forms of work, and encouraging local economic development that is sustainable and will create new, good jobs to replace those lost in the fishing sector.

<sup>15</sup> This section does not address the impact of rising temperatures leading to the reduction in fish production, which is an even larger threat. For example, in SE Asia this will seriously affect the region's productive potential as the world's largest producer of fish and marine products.