

# Fish for All

## Summary of Plenary Panel Session Fish for All Summit 3 November 2002 Penang, Malaysia

Nearly 300 participants from over 40 countries including fisheries specialists, development assistance experts, fisher organizations, civil society representatives, and several government fisheries ministers from Asia and Africa concluded a one day Summit called 'Fish for All' in Penang this week (3 November). The Summit concluded that, given the many benefits of wholesome food, livelihoods and environments that are based on fish and other aquatic life, all people should embrace the vision of 'Fish for All forever'.

However, the Summit discussions highlighted the challenges the world faces to achieve this vision. Basically, many poor coastal, lake and river-based communities and even the urban poor are losing their access to fish as prices rise with increasing demand. The WorldFish Center, which is coordinating the just-launched Fish for All Initiative, and other interested agencies will be developing and refining an action agenda to build on the Summit outcomes. The Global Steering Committee of Fish for All, chaired by Professor M.S. Swaminathan, a World Food Prize winner, will be advising how to bring fish access issues to the attention of decision makers and the public.

The following is a summary of the discussion at the concluding Plenary Panel Session.

### **Professor M.S. Swaminathan: Concluding Remarks**

Although the title of our Initiative is 'Fish for All', we use the term 'fish' to mean all living aquatic resources, or 'aquatic-based food sources'. Likewise, Fish for All is concerned with aquatic food sources whether in coastal, marine, freshwater or brackish water.

In all that we do, we should be mindful of whether our actions support the four pillars. Are the actions:

- pro-environment
- pro-poor,
- pro-women,
- pro-livelihood opportunities (job-led)

**Gender dimensions** are exceedingly important in all aspects of fisheries. For example, health hazards are associated with specific female-dominated jobs (e.g. manual prawn peeling in export factories). Non-tariff trade barriers (e.g., sanitary measures) can be barriers to trade but women can launch initiatives on quality in developing countries to overcome these barriers. Indeed, given the importance of trade at the local, national and international level for fish products, then developing countries need a veritable 'quality literacy movement' to make the most from fish supplies.

Governments have produced a large number of **treaties and conventions** and coordination is needed among them. Often these treaties and conventions are negotiated and managed by officials from ministries without direct experience and knowledge of fisheries (e.g. development assistance, agriculture, health, trade, etc) and so their implications for fish are not directly included.

More partnerships are needed in the management of aquatic resources. We have to find ways to involve all the stakeholders, including taking account of inter-generational needs.

We should emphasize the great importance of the **media in getting messages across**. The Internet has also opened up many opportunities for fishers. In India, for example, at local knowledge centers, semi-literate women download information about sea conditions from NOAA satellites, and broadcast it through loudspeakers to the fishers preparing to put out to sea in their small craft.

Unfortunately, conflicts already abound over the use of natural resources such as fish, land and water, conflicts over access to fishing grounds, conflicts between fishers and environmentalists, and trade conflicts. We need good mechanisms for **resolution of conflicts**. Conflict resolution will become an increasingly important tool in achieving Fish for All forever, the Summit felt. Scientists can help resolve conflicts by providing the facts if these are in dispute, or when values are the cause of the disputes, and by developing and advising on socially and politically acceptable approaches to conflict and dispute resolution. Social science has much to offer in this area.

## **Dr Doris Capistrano: Conclusions from the Panel on Food and Livelihoods**

**Voice of Fishers:** Fisheries provide significant employment in developing countries, but often fishing people are marginalized, lack a voice and thus have little say in their futures; new perspectives on sustainable livelihoods are required to change this.

**Fisheries recognized by international initiatives:** In many international initiatives (e.g. climate change assessments) fisheries are not on the agenda.

Although the WTO offers significant opportunities for developing countries in fish trade, these opportunities are only able to be realized if market access is obtained and maintained.

**Trade advantages and disadvantages for developing countries:** Developing countries have some trade advantages such as lower costs of production but fish food safety and quality standards will play a greater role in determining market access and trade. Certification systems could be useful for safety standards and are promising tools, but often efforts now underway to ensure they do not militate against the poor should be increased.

The **role of the business sector** is critical in obtaining and maintaining access to fish for the poor. Public/private partnerships are to be encouraged.

Fish and other living aquatic resources are frequently overlooked in environmental and development assessments. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change climate change assessments should address the impacts of different climate scenarios on fish; the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment should also ensure that the status of fish and other aquatic resources are well incorporated.

The Summit found that the **data available to assess the patterns of access to fish** were too aggregated to be useful for designing interventions (e.g. per capita consumption patterns were usually only available at the national level and gender, household, and local distinctions were seldom made).

The roles of low input vs. high tech aquaculture were discussed and their respective net contributions need further study (e.g., some technologies might increase income but be detrimental to environment). However fish are produced (by culture or from nature), the world needs a **diversity of fishes** to fill a great diversity of needs, from remote fish-dependent island villages to urban dwellers.

## **Professor Robert Kearney: Conclusions from Panel on Environment**

Fish and their production and availability are impacted by a large number of environmental factors.

**Coordination between international conventions** is badly needed, as are implementation and compliance.

The **sustainability of aquaculture** is still quite contentious, involving issues of its scale, interactions with the environment and other sectors such as agriculture, etc).

**Policies to focus on the 'people'**: Information is key to policies that governments make but what information is actually needed? Past efforts on fish have tended to overlook the most important information – that on the people and their livelihoods – and has focused more on the fish.

Considerable attention has been given to **marine and other protected areas** as a solution for overfishing. However, to be effective, protected area management faces many challenges especially how can they be effectively managed, who participates in this management and whether the communities comply with the arrangements.

**Education** needed for Fish for All. Education concerns knowledge generation and knowledge dissemination.

Creative solutions to ensuring Fish for All will have to make use of knowledge (the facts), research (to find more facts) and good stories with the human dimensions to help disseminate the message. Identifying problems is a key part but we must go well beyond this and start finding solutions.

**Centralize or decentralize resource management**: Devolution of natural resource management responsibility to local managers is still seen as contentious. Will efficiency and effectiveness break down at this scale and how will devolved management of small units of the resources match with ecosystem and even national boundaries. In ensuring the resource base for Fish for All, managers will need to identify problems and the scales at which these problems should best be addressed.

Many at the Summit identified the critical issue of **property rights** in better fisheries management but caution was also expressed that great care and responsibility should be taken in assignment of rights. Empowering the stronger groups could disenfranchise those for whom fishing rights were most critical and lead to much worse poverty, not less.

## **Panelist Dr Raymond Offenheiser**

In influencing people and institutions we should remember the power of stories to convey messages.

Fish for All should be cognizant of the centrality of the human dimensions and human spirit in its actions plans. Globally, more emphasis is now being given to the right to food as a primary human right, along with other basic economic, cultural, social, etc rights.

That said, ensuring this basic human right requires that the poor are linked to what we are trying to accomplish. This is not straightforward. Problems of barriers and exclusion, and even of definitions of poverty abound. For Fish for All, the Initiative will have to build an institutional

architecture that links the poor reliant on fish to other international initiatives. With globalization, and less structure than before; one has to fight this. Coordinated by a CGIAR Center (WorldFish Center), Fish for All can act as a repository of knowledge, be inclusive, and develop strong intellectual honesty on the issues.

The **challenges of inclusiveness** will mean building a constituency for support through even more institutional linkages – including those with non-traditional allies on human rights, the environment, civil society, business, etc. Links with water initiatives are also critical now, as are the links with agriculture and anti-pollution constituencies. Fish for All will have to work in a multi-stakeholder environment.

**Knowledge must be used** to drive important social change, looking well beyond productivity into livelihoods and fish.

Governance concepts should recognize that **political power and will** are key elements in managing resources.

Although **globalization** drives great transformations, its results may often work against the poor.

## **Selected Discussion Points**

### **1. Alternative livelihoods:**

Fish for all -> all for fish -> all for fishers

In Vietnam, many poor people in the coastal area are fishers, with difficult lives. The Government has proposed transferring some of their activities to aquaculture, as they are VERY poor (US\$ 3-5 a month); but the problem is that the land is already allocated to farmers. Technology may be able to find good species to grow on saline soils and also help remedy some environmental impacts of past practices.

When moving from fishing to aquaculture, little is understood about how the change affects access to local, small fish which are important in the peoples' diets. These small fish and other aquatic organisms can be lost altogether or even go to feeding aquaculture species. Fish for All placed an appropriate emphasis on fish for poor people who should be able to retain access to the fish.

### **2. What should Fish for All do to place its message higher on the international agenda?**

The Initiative should stress the importance of the message and develop clear and good slogans to help this. But it also needs to provide a depth of analysis and understanding of the background to the messages by outlining the background problems, educating people, etc. Fish for All will need to stay well focused or risk losing its audience. In terms of actions, we could first ensure a constituency on the issues and then a coherent timing for the actions. For example, reports on any outcomes, events, etc could be released simultaneously across the world to obtain maximum attention to the issue.

### **3. Act now or wait until we know more?**

The Summit felt that we have enough knowledge to start acting now, but we need to sustain actions. More information is needed as well but the old ways of doing science should be superseded urgently in light of new realities with privatization, less funding and more multi-stakeholder constituencies. Niches must be sharply defined. Many members of the public have a

fundamental mistrust of science and technology and science often lacks credibility, particularly among the poor who ask whose knowledge, what is it for, how is it used? The urgency of the problems also demands much faster turnaround between the identification of the problem and the drafting of solutions. Peer to peer learning on the ground also has a major role in capacity building, and in keeping scientists honest. But, we should also not lose sight of the fact that local knowledge has its limitations and has to be supplemented by scientific approaches.

In particular, more detailed information will be needed to direct action to the priority issues. Now, the level of information available is too aggregated to help direct action. For example, national per person fish consumption is known for each country but since it varies greatly in different parts of each country, the national averages are not very useful for targeting on-the-ground action. To really understand how people are losing or achieving access to fish, household level information is needed, especially to understand the gender aspects.

#### **4. Recognizing the importance and power of the fisheries sector**

The Summit has revealed to us all the power and importance of the fisheries sector and its relevance to poverty eradication. Bringing this awareness to a wider audience is critical. Fish are not given much attention in international assessments and in international treaties, etc. For example, the Summit felt that the assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change should undertake major assessments on the outlook for fish under the different climate change scenarios. Presently, little attention is given to fisheries and aquaculture although serious analysis is done for agriculture and forestry. Under the World Trade Organization, again, little sectoral attention is given to fish, despite the huge amount of fish traded internationally (nearly 40% of world production, more by value than tea, coffee, cocoa and sugar combined and more than all livestock products combined). Developing countries were major players in world fish trade, a phenomenon largely of the last decade.

### **Developing the Fish for All Initiative: Remarks by Dr M. Williams**

The actual work plan and details of the Initiative are now being shaped. The Summit has been the first, scene-setting event of Fish for All. It has allowed us to see some of the challenges we face in putting fish on the global agenda, and indeed even on the national agendas. For example, although the Summit has talked quite a lot about China as the dominant fish producing country of the world, in China, fish receives little attention because it is such a minor part of the national economy. We should also remember to put fish more in to the health debates. A recent study showed that under-nutrition is the most important factor shortening people's lives, and that the 10<sup>th</sup> most important cause is over-nutrition. Any threat to fish supplies for the poor who currently rely on them will affect the health and lives of poor in developing countries, and perhaps the overweight could help control their weight by switching to a healthier diet containing fish!

Under fish for All, WorldFish Center will develop plans and actions with collaborators not only from the scientific world but also much, much more broadly among stakeholder groups. We intend a long term investment (e.g., 10 years). We do not like to call this an 'advocacy' campaign because that implies taking a position and sticking to it even if the context changes or new information reveals a better course.

We are adamant that Fish for All is about having impacts and changing the way business is done. Our steps to date have been:

- Establishing the Global Steering Committee (see full list below)
  - Members were selected not only for their experience and achievements but also for their knowledge of how to influence opinion and get things done;
- Establishing a website and e-forum

- Preparing a Fish for All background concept paper
- Compiling a Guide to the Fish-Related Paragraphs of the Plan of Implementation of the WSSD
- Holding this Fish for All Summit

**Events to be developed are:**

- Extract priority themes from the Summit discussions.
- Promote the outcomes and finalize the reports of this Summit.
- New ways of reaching policy and decision makers and involving stakeholders on the themes, considering all possible channels from use of the Internet to targeted meetings with decision makers.
- Forming high-level strategic alliances on the priority themes and on the overall Initiative. These alliances will be of a different level again to the numerous (presently 259) program-based formal partnerships that WorldFish Center has in place.

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- University of Canberra
- WWF International
- WorldFish Center

The following members of the Global Steering Committee attended the Summit:

- Professor M.S. Swaminathan
- Professor Kenji Hotta
- Dr Raymond. C. Offenheiser
- Honorable Leticia Ramos Shahani
- Dr Robert Watson
- Professor Yehia Hassan Khalil, representing Dr Youssuf Wally

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON FISH FOR ALL, VISIT THE WEBSITE AT [www.fishforall.org](http://www.fishforall.org)**

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