



Fisherfolks say no to the Coastal Fisheries Initiative

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Joint Press Statement by the World Forum of Fisher Peoples' (WFFP) and the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF)

With the Coastal Fisheries Initiative (CFI) the FAO, the World Bank, Conservation International and others have launched a wide reaching program aiming at the reform of fisheries policy across the world. Through a period of 4 years, 235 million USD will be distributed through a number of projects in countries spanning Latin America, Africa and South-East Asia. The program is funded jointly by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and a few governments, NGOs, foundations and private sector actors. The CFI will have devastating impacts for small-scale fisher folk in the targeted countries and regions and the actors behind the CFI furthermore want their reforms to inform global fisheries policy. With this statement we, as representatives of over 20 million fisher people, wish to express our firm opposition to the CFI, which directly contradict the implementation of the recently endorsed Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (VGSSF)¹.

A top-down process

The content in the program framework document (PFD)² of the CFI has been developed and written by an exclusive set of people from the six GEF implementing agencies and the GEF secretariat. As is clear from this framework document, the CFI's content is already specified in great detail and the remaining work in developing the CFI therefore consists of completing this top-down process by sketching out implementation plans in the six targeted countries. Nonetheless, the PFD hails the initiative for involving "broad consultations from the beginning of its development process".

1 <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4356e.pdf>

2 <http://worldfishers.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/GEF-CFI-Framework-document.pdf>

However, from day one, the CFI contravened the basic principle of participation of the VGSSF, which emphasises that affected small-scale fishing communities should be involved in decision making prior to decisions being taken. Instead, through their version of 'consultation' (i.e. answering questionnaires and participating in workshops) we were reduced to the level of other 'stakeholders' on par with private-sector representatives, academics etc. although we are the ones who represent the people who stand to be most affected by the CFI. In addition hereto, this is also far from what the FAO Director-General termed a "bottom-up participatory development process" surrounding the VGSSF, where we as the representatives of actual rights-holders, i.e. people on the ground, were recognized as a formal negotiating partner. In this regard, we would like to remind GEF and the six implementing agencies, herein FAO, of the fate of the World Bank's Global Partnership for Oceans, which we heavily criticized in our 'Call on Governments'³ amongst others for lack of real inclusion of rights-holder representatives.

Ocean Grabbing

This lack of real inclusion shines through in the content of the CFI. While the document at various stages stresses that the CFI will deliver on environmental, social and economic goals and "ensuring the human well-being", it becomes clear that the concrete content of the programs for the targeted countries all focus on the implementing of Rights-Based Fisheries (RBF). As we document in the aforementioned Call on Governments and as has been documented extensively in the joint publication 'The Global Ocean Grab'⁴, the introduction of RBF wreaks havoc in coastal communities, as the privatization process unleashed benefits a small elite, while dispossessing the majority. By using 'strategically benign' rhetoric, the CFI has imitated the tactics of earlier global initiatives, where, as the collective behind the Global Ocean Grab explain, "Some of the key institutions that are paving the way for ocean grabbing have adapted a human rights based language and they argue that their policy reform initiatives are rooted in the need for [...] poverty eradication. However, many examples around the world show that the underlying principles guiding reform processes is a blind belief in [...] solutions that are in direct contrast to the wishes and demands of representative civil-society organisations."

The CFI has a blind belief in RBF, which aims at a privatization of maritime resources as the cure-all to any and all problems relating to the environment as well as poverty reduction. However, as the Development Today magazine reported back in March 2015 in relation to the termination of the Global Partnership for Oceans, this approach is beginning to be questioned:

3 http://worldfishers.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/WFFP-WFF-Call-on-Governments_GPO_200313.pdf

4 http://worldfishers.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/The_Global_Ocean_Grab-EN.pdf

“Despite numerous discussions between the bank [World Bank] and Norway, which led to some changes, both the aid agency Norad and Norway’s Institute of Marine Research gave a thumbs down to the project.”

“Earlier, the World Forum of Fisher Peoples...called on governments to abandon the GPO.”

*“Norad’s opinion was that the **GPO would probably not contribute to poverty reduction [emphasised]**...”⁵*

The introduction of RBF in the targeted countries and everywhere else would stand in direct contrast to the progressive content of the VGSSF, which stresses the need for the Human-Rights Based Approach as a key tool to poverty reduction. In this light, we are also abhorred at the CFI’s claim of wanting to implement the VGSSF, when the concrete policies that are to be introduced are so clearly about prioritizing the interests of the private sector and/or narrow environmental concerns, thereby contradicting the VGSSF.

In this light, we have declined an invitation to at this point become a member of the CFI-steering committee. Accepting the invitation where the content of the CFI is already clearly defined would mean legitimizing the RBF-policies that we have spent years fighting against. It would be a huge blow to the implementation of the VGSSF, which we continue to strive for.

5 <http://worldfishers.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Development-Today--World-Bank-winds-up-fisheries-initiative.pdf>