

# Small Time, Big Numbers, Small Attention, Big Task: The Role of Small-Scale Fisheries and Small-Scale Aquaculture in Food Security and Livelihoods in Southeast Asia

Nerissa D. Salayo

Associate Scientist

SEAFDEC Aquaculture Department

Tigbauan, Iloilo, Philippines

Maripaz L. Perez

Regional Director for Asia

The WorldFish Center

Penang, Malaysia

The small-scale fisheries (SSF) sector in Southeast Asia (SEA) is being confronted by having too many fishers catching too few fishes while governance is wanting with regard to adequately meeting its task of feeding and providing livelihoods to millions. Asia has the largest number of fishers and fish farmers (37.3 million), majority of them are in SEA. This sector has perennially been burdened with issues of poverty, high population growth, malnutrition, health and sanitation problems, low levels of education, lack of capital assets including problems on access rights to resource base, unemployment and high vulnerability to impacts of climate change – a picture of economically marginalized group of people living in or near water bodies in SEA. In 1995, the Kyoto International Conference on the Sustainable Contribution of Fisheries to Food Security noted the continuously growing world population and the need to secure enough food for the people in present and future generations. It also noted the significant contribution of fisheries to income and wealth for all people. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) likewise recognized the important role of SSF in equitable and inclusive development. Thus, global, regional and national undertakings involving the SSF sector aimed to contribute to these goals. In October 2008, the First Global Conference in SSF was held in Bangkok, Thailand to address social, economic and human rights issues; secure sustainable resource use and access rights; and secure postharvest benefits for all SSF stakeholders. Meanwhile, an assessment of the small-scale aquaculture (SSA) is also being addressed by FAO in its ongoing projects on methods and indicators for evaluating its contribution to rural development.



23–27 November • Manila, Philippines

The role of SSF and SSA in food security and livelihoods has indeed been recognized globally. Actions and policies to support these roles have generally been institutionalized by influencing the way the fisheries is governed and co-managed with its stakeholders. However, the sector is still being put to test while it fulfills its roles as more issues are emerging due to local and global developments and drivers of change. With the integration of markets and globalization in the trade of live reef fish and other high-value mollusk and crustaceans, the role of SSF and SSA in securing food and livelihoods extends beyond the SEA region.

In the midst of mounting economic needs and opportunities, the role of SSF and SSA needs careful handling to save its primary fishery beneficiaries from the toll arising from depleted fishery and degraded environment. A better understanding of the characteristics and nature of operations of the SSF and SSA and those of the markets for the produce of the sector is proposed. There is the need for innovative and effective ways to build human capacity. Informed fishery stakeholders are expected to promote and adhere to responsible use through acceptable management plans, policies and governance systems that could sustain the fishery at various levels and scales. A review of existing roles and a vision of the challenges to the roles of SSF and SSA form the agenda of the present paper.