

SMALL SCALE FISHING

Definition

Defining artisan/small-scale fisheries is one of the hardest riddle to deal with. If one walks down to a pier, wherever on the planet, the locals know exactly what small-scale fisheries are. At the same time, it is impossible to find a realistic international definition.

Some years ago, a FAO¹ committee did an honest attempt to define this. It ended up with a confusing 200 word paragraph. I believe that WFF (World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers) came up with a solution: to let each and every nation define their artisan/small-scale fisheries: internationally, each and everyone recognizes the definition.

Artisan/small-scale fisheries span a huge spectrum. The size of fishing vessels differentiates from curved planks of 3-4 meters to high-tech 13 meter fibreglass high speed boats, up to 70 ton ships. This difference can at large be explained by the circumstances the fishermen are dealing with and of course the economic situation in their regions.

Many artisan/indigenous/small-scale fishers do not even use motorized equipment. We have all seen pictures of fishermen using a single small cast net or a single hook on a rod. They don't use boats and wade out from the coast. Also, there are divers (without any modern equipment) collecting lobsters and shells close to the coast. Inland, both by rivers and lakes, there are hundreds of thousands of fishermen, fishing with methods known for thousands of years, entirely for their families and local consumption. Artisan/small-scale fisheries are among the oldest ways on the planet to survive and make a living. Archaeological finds prove that artisan/small-scale/coastal fishers of today have done little changes to their fishing gears for thousands of years. Even in the northern hemisphere, where civilization is much younger than in other parts of the world, hooks, as old as 4.700 years old have been found, looking quite similar to what small-scale fishers use today.

According to FAO, there are approximately 25 million small-scale fishers on the planet. The thumb rule is that 3 jobs are created for every job at sea. This means that all together there are at least 100 million people involved in the small-scale fisheries. Calculate by four, 400 million people depend on the small-scale fisheries. That is only 6% of the world population, but still much more than the population of the USA and a little less than the population of the EU 27. It is important to keep in mind, that a large portion of these 6% is the poorest people on the planet - living under the infamous USD 1 a day income.

Artisan/indigenous/small-scale fisheries can at large be defined as a 'self sufficient way of making a living'. They aim to feeding a family, whether it is directly or through local sales or export. The beauty of the small scale-fisheries is that it appeals to common sense on how to harvest the oceans. Why would artisan/indigenous/small-scale fishermen destroy the marine environment? In order to survive, they need the marine stocks to thrive and be prosperous. Their future is at stake.

Arthur Bogason, April 2009.

Co-president of the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers

Official website: www.worldfishforum.org (work in progress)

Alternative website: <http://www.terre-citoyenne.org/des-allies/peche/wff.html>

¹ United Nations – Food & Agriculture Organization