Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

BOBP

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Norway

High-Level Meeting on

Policy Guidance for Mainstreaming Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management in Small-Scale Fisheries

Villa Nautica Paradise Island Resort
20 - 22 February 2025 | Lankanfinolhu, Maldives

PROSPECTUS

BAY OF BENGAL LME

Background

The Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) Project is a joint effort to promote sustainable management of fisheries, marine resources, and critical habitats in one of the most biodiverse and economically significant regions in the world. Spanning eight countries – Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand – the BOBLME region is vital to millions of people, supporting livelihoods, national economies, and food security. However, the ecosystem faces severe threats from overfishing, habitat destruction, pollution, and the impacts of climate change.

The BOBLME Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) highlighted key challenges for fisheries sector, especially, small-scale fisheries, such as overexploitation, habitat degradation, and pollution. These issues have arisen due to excessive fishing pressure, destructive practices, and weak governance, all of which are compounded by growing populations and limited alternative livelihoods. Small-scale fisheries, which is essential for food security and coastal livelihoods, is increasingly marginalized. To address this, the BOBLME Project has prioritized the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) as a transformative strategy. EAFM aims to integrate ecological health, social equity, and economic sustainability, ensuring that fisheries management addresses broader ecosystem and community needs.

Under the BOBLME Project, Component 1: Sustainable Management of Fisheries seeks to establish and implement the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM). This approach integrates ecological health, social equity, and economic viability, ensuring that fisheries management considers broader ecosystem and community impacts. The component also targets critical issues like combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, conserving transboundary fish stocks, and strengthening governance mechanisms.

The BOBLME Project is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and NORAD with co-financing from member countries and development partners. It is implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in partnership with key regional organizations, including the Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC). The project's collaborative structure ensures both regional coordination and local engagement, critical for addressing the transboundary nature of the issues at hand.

Policy Challenges in Marine Fisheries

The sustainable fisheries management in the Bay of Bengal region faces multiple challenges. Overfishing, driven by unrestricted access to marine resources and excessive fishing effort, has resulted in stock depletion and biodiversity loss. The prevalence of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing exacerbates this problem, undermining conservation efforts and displacing legitimate small-scale fishers.

Small-scale fisheries (SSF) is a fisheries subsector that exploit aquatic resources by employing labour-intensive harvesting, processing and distribution technologies. The definition of SSF varies by context, and there is no uniformity among countries. This applies to the Bay of Bengal rim countries as well, where there is a great diversity of fishing types to harvest diverse aquatic resources. With the attention to the SSF on the rise, and the emergence of policy tools devoted to SSF in different regions, it is pertinent to emphasise the need for arriving at a clear definition of SSG in the Bay of Bengal region.

In this prospectus, the term SSF is used based on simple categorisation into small-scale and mechanized fisheries, albeit requires a systematic and empirical examination. Though drawing an exact line could be contested, in this categorisation, the SSF refers to fishing practiced from small boats with or without outboard motor, or even without any boat. On the other hand, in the mechanised fisheries, the fishers use in-board engine placed in a wheelhouse.

Gleaning the historic information, while the SSF have been historically integral to the socio-economic fabric of Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka, a widening gap between the SSF and mechanized fisheries is evident[1]. In the 1950s and 1960s, fisheries in these countries primarily relied on simple and accessible gear such as handlines, bagnets, cast nets and gillnets. While SSF have provided substantial dividends to the coastal fishing communities in the form of food security and income, total catch and macro dividend remain insignificant prompting countries to engineer technological upgrades.

By the 1970s, the introduction of mechanized boats including the trawlers increased the fish catch manifold and their importance and share in fisheries sector started to bolster. Although SSF still contributed 76.7%, their technological dividends began to erode as traditional gear became relatively less efficient, while mechanized fisheries reaped economic dividends from exporting high-value species like shrimp. In the 1990s, mechanized fisheries surpassed the SSF, contributing 52.8% to the total catch compared to 47.2% from the SSF. The SSF operators faced declining incomes and ecological pressures due to overfishing. By the 2010s, mechanized fisheries accounted for 54.5% of the total catch, with share of the SSF further dropping to 45.5%. The adoption of advanced technologies such as bottom trawls and longlines provided mechanized fisheries with substantial technological dividends but at a significant ecological cost, including overfishing and bycatch, which undermined the ecological dividends once offered by the SSF.

The Maldives offers an intriguing parallel and contrast to the Bay of Bengal in the development of its fisheries sector. Similar to the Bay, the SSF in the Maldives have been historically integral to the country's economy and culture. These fisheries relied on traditional gear such as pole-and-line, handlines and simple nets, primarily

[1] *Data source: SeaAroundUs Project*

targeting pelagic species like tuna. In the 1950s, the SSF in the Maldives accounted for a significant share of the total catch, played a vital role in supporting livelihoods and food security, much like the Bay of Bengal's dominance of SSF operations. Subsequently, SSF in the Maldives continued to evolve throughout the period and continued in the 2020s, integrating better technologies and aligning with global sustainability standards. It has adopted modern technology in terms of boats and gear, as well as contemporary approaches to trading in the global marketplace for tuna products. It is also notable for the predominant use of pole and line gear technology that produces a high quality of catch with minimal environmental impact, while retaining key aspects of SSF characteristics.

Thus, the Maldives achieved a balance between modernization and sustainability, in contrast to the Bay of Bengal, where mechanized fisheries led to overfishing and ecological challenges. The Maldives' emphasis on sustainable practices, particularly in tuna fishing, enabled the sector to retain substantial ecological dividends while realizing considerable economic gains. This trajectory highlights how targeted policies and a commitment to sustainability can enable small-scale fisheries to thrive alongside advancements.

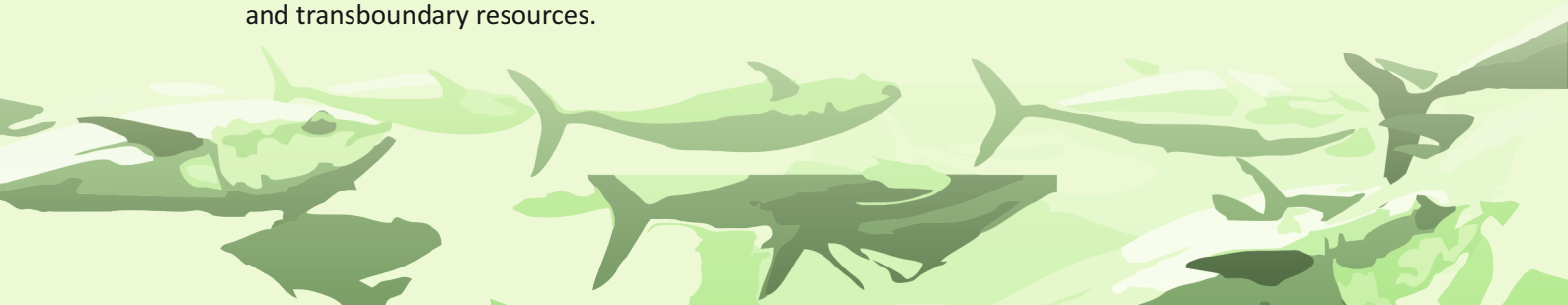
Apart from widening gaps within fisheries subsectors, the other issues with crosscutting impacts in the region are pollution, habitat destruction and climate change. Marine debris due to abandonment and discard of commercial fishing gear is one of the problems of marine pollution. Abandoned gear remain in the oceans for years, continuing to entangle fish and marine animals in the fishing nets, killing them. Habitat degradation is another pressing concern, with mangroves, coral reefs, and seagrasses being increasingly threatened by unsustainable fishing practices, coastal development, and pollution. Additionally, the impacts of climate change due to rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, and extreme weather events pose significant risks to the SSF by disrupting the ecosystems, displacing fish populations and reducing fish availability.

These challenges are compounded by limited institutional capacity, weak governance, and inadequate participation of marginalized groups, including women and indigenous communities in resource management decisions. While these challenges are affecting all the fisheries sub-sectors, their impact on the SSF is likely to be higher given the growing marginalization of this sector, and calls for urgent policy intervention.

Potential Role of EAFM in Addressing Challenges

The Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) offers a holistic and adaptive framework to address the complex challenges facing SSF. Unlike traditional fisheries management, which focuses on maximizing yields, EAFM integrates ecological sustainability, social equity, and economic viability. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of marine ecosystems and human communities, emphasizing the need to balance resource use with environmental protection.

Through EAFM, fisheries management can incorporate the needs of small-scale fishers while promoting biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods. By aligning national policies with international frameworks like the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (VGSSF) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), EAFM strengthens governance and fosters collaboration among stakeholders. For instance, the integration of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) can enhance habitat protection, while the RFMO Agreements provide a platform for managing shared and transboundary resources.

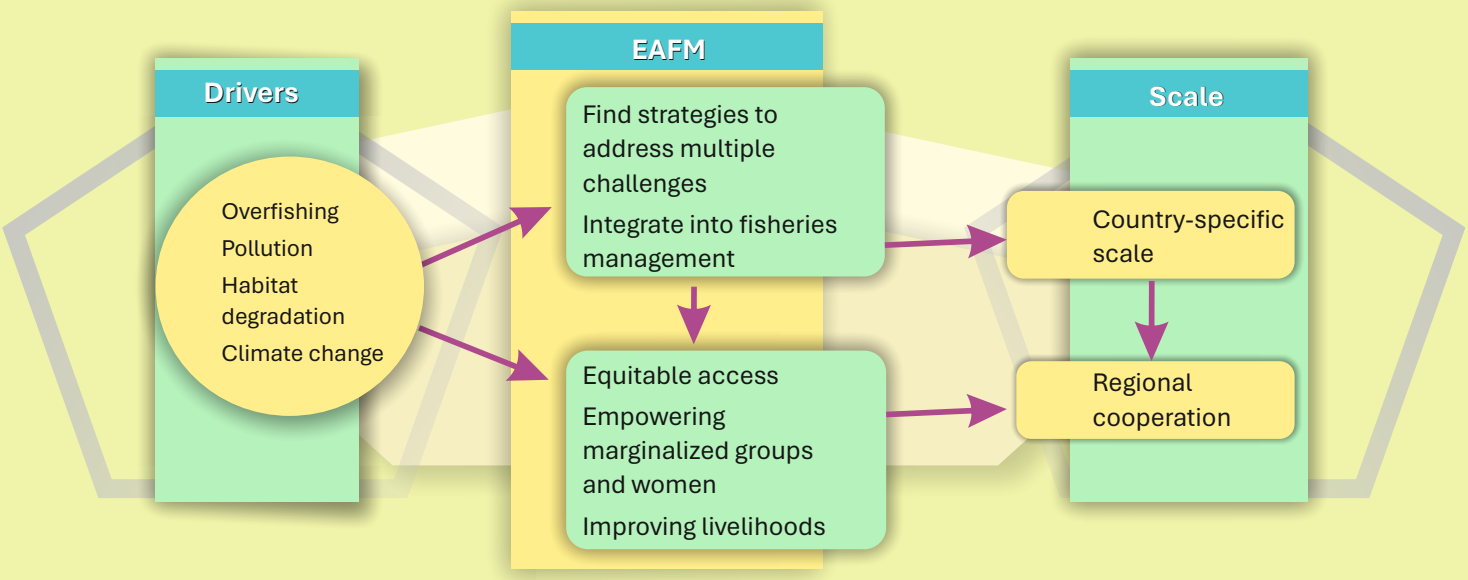


Regional Cooperation under EAFM

Regional cooperation is pivotal to the success of EAFM, particularly in addressing cross-border issues related to as migratory stocks are not the migratory fish stocks, IUU fishing, and climate change impacts. To enhance cooperation, countries in the Bay of Bengal region can adopt the following actionable strategies:

- **Shared Management of Transboundary Resources:** Establish transboundary marine protected areas (MPAs) or collaboratively managed fishing zones to protect shared ecosystems and migratory species like hilsa shad and Indian mackerel.
- **Joint Monitoring and Reporting Systems:** Develop standardized protocols for monitoring fish stocks, habitat conditions, and biodiversity outcomes, ensuring consistent data collection and evidence-based decision-making across countries.
- **Collaborative Enforcement Mechanisms:** Strengthen monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) systems to combat IUU fishing through coordinated patrols, shared vessel tracking systems, and cross-border enforcement agreements.
- **Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building:** Facilitate regional workshops and training programs to exchange best practices, build technical expertise, and enhance stakeholder participation in EAFM implementation.
- **Inclusive Governance Structures:** Promote participatory governance mechanisms that include small-scale fishers, particularly women and marginalized groups, ensuring that their perspectives and knowledge are integrated into policy decisions.
- **Climate Change Adaptation:** Coordinate climate adaptation strategies to enhance the resilience of SSF, such as protecting spawning grounds, restoring degraded habitats, and adopting ecosystem-based approaches to disaster risk reduction.

By leveraging these strategies, countries can collectively address the challenges facing marine fisheries while ensuring sustainable resource use, equitable benefits, and the long-term health of marine ecosystems. ***EAFM, when combined with robust regional cooperation, provides a pathway to transform marine fisheries into a model of sustainable and inclusive development for the Bay of Bengal region.***



Objectives of the Meeting

The primary objective of this high-level meeting is to develop actionable policy guidance for implementing EAFM in small-scale fisheries across the Bay of Bengal region, with focus on BOBP-IGO member-countries.

Specifically, the meeting aims to address the following broad questions:

- What strategies have the countries adopted (or planning) to address the multiple challenges of overfishing, pollution, habitat degradation and climate change, while ensuring that conservation measures align with the livelihood needs of fishers?
- How to target small-scale fisheries (SSF) in national policies to meet their technical, socio-economic, and cultural needs;
- What mechanisms can be established to ensure equitable access to resources and decision-making authority for women and marginalized groups in small-scale fisheries, thereby promoting inclusive governance?
- What roles can the regional organizations play to support national policies towards development of SSF and address shared issues such as IUU fishing, marine pollution, and data sharing?

Participants

Participants include senior representatives of the Government, academia, and civil society organizations from Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Next Steps

- Finalize and disseminate the policy guideline to member countries and stakeholders.
- Organize follow-up capacity-building programs and technical workshops to operationalize EAFM principles.
- Establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress and adapt strategies as needed.
- Discuss the inputs among the fisher community organization from the region for their inputs and concerns.

Expected Outcome

The expected outcome of this workshop is the preparation of a Policy Guideline for Implementing EAFM in marine fisheries.

This guideline will serve as a roadmap for national and regional actions, outlining:

- A harmonized definition of SSF that addresses socio-economic, ecological, and cultural dimensions.
- Policy recommendations for integrating EAFM into national fisheries management plans.
- Regional collaboration mechanisms, including shared monitoring systems, joint conservation efforts, and climate adaptation frameworks.
- Strategies for aligning national policies with international commitments, such as the SDG 14.

Programme (Provisional)

Day 1
20 Feb 2025

Time	Programme	Person/Venue
0830 – 0900	**Registration**	
0900 – 1045	**Session I: Inaugural Session**	
0900 – 0920	Welcome, Introductions and Context Setting	**Dr. P. Krishnan,** Director, BOBP-IGO
0920 – 1000	**Keynote Addresses: Regional cooperation in respect of ocean and oceanic resources: Country perspectives**	
	Bangladesh	**H.E. Md Sohel Parvez,** *Acting High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Maldives* **Md. Imam Uddin Kabir,** *Add. Secretary, MFL, Govt. of Bangladesh*
	India	**H.E. G. Balasubramanian,** *High Commissioner of India to Maldives* **Dr. Abhilaksh Likhi,** *Secretary (Fisheries), Govt. of India*
	Sri Lanka	**H.E. D. Amanulla,** *Acting High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to Maldives* **Mr. Sampath Manthrinayake,** *Secretary, MFAOR, Govt. of Sri Lanka*
1000 – 1015	**Inaugural Address** Maldives' strategy for a sustainable fisheries and ocean resources	**Mr. Ahmed Shiyam,** *Hon'ble Minister, Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources (MFOR), Govt. of Maldives*
1015 – 1020	Vote of Thanks	**Dr. Hussain Sinan,** *DG (Fisheries), MFOR, Govt. of Maldives*
1020 – 1045	**Group Picture & High Tea**	
TECHNICAL SESSIONS		
1045 – 1245	**Session II: Characteristics of the Small-Scale Fisheries in the region a Cross-Country Analysis**	
Co-chairs	**Dr. Abhilaksh Likhi,** *Secretary (Fisheries), Govt. of India*	**Mr. Sampath Manthrinayake,** *Secretary, MFAOR, Govt. of Sri Lanka*
1045 – 1055	Role of Government in promoting balanced intra-sectoral development in marine fisheries & building regional cooperation on SSF in BOBLME	**Ms. Angela Lentisco,** *FAO-RAP*
1055 – 1110	Small-Scale Fisheries in the BOBP Region – Some Policy Issues	**Dr. P. Krishnan,** Director, BOBP-IGO
1110 – 1230	Panel Discussion ● Significance in defining SSF at national and regional level - Common minimum criteria	15 min presentation by each country (60 mins)

	Time	Programme	Person/Venue
		● Roadmap for further engagement of the Government to promote balanced development	Discussion with all participants (20 mins)
	1230 – 1245	Session Summary	Co-Chairs
	1245 – 1400	**Lunch**	
	1400 – 1600	**Session III: Synergizing National and Regional Efforts to Mainstream EAFM in SSF**	
	Co-chairs	**Md. Imam Uddin Kabir,** *Add. Secretary, MFL, Govt. of Bangladesh*	**Dr. Hussain Sinan,** *DG (Fisheries), MFOR Govt. of Maldives*
	1400 – 1415	NPOA SSF and NPOA Capacity: Opportunities for linking EAFM	**Ms. Angela Lentisco,** *FAO-RAP*
	1415 – 1430	EAFM Framework: Scoping National Policies and Laws for their alignment with EAFM from the perspective of SSF Sector	**Dr. P. Krishnan,** Director, BOBP-IGO
	1430 – 1530	<u>Panel Discussion</u> ● Challenges in adapting to changing climate and need for cooperation ● Best practices/cases with potential for regional scale-up ● National policy process/ mechanisms to bridge the gaps in alignment of EAFM and the support needed	12 min presentation by each country (48 mins) Discussion with all participants (12 mins)
	1530 – 1545	**Refreshments**	
	1545 – 1600	Session Summary	Co-Chairs
	1600 – 1615	Closing Remarks: Key Messages from Day 1 and Way forward	**Dr. P. Krishnan,** Director, BOBP-IGO Co-Chairs
	1830 – 2030	**Welcome Dinner**	
Day 2 21 Feb 2025	1445 – 1515	Policy Guidance for Mainstreaming EAFM in Small-Scale Fisheries: Presentation & Discussion on the Outcomes of the High-level Meeting	Closed Door Meeting with the Members of the Governing Council of the BOBP-IGO and invited observers
Day 3 22 Feb 2025	0900 – 1700	Field Visit *(Reef fishing; Visit to Marine Research Facility, Fish landing Centre, Fish Market)**	National delegates & observers

** Subject to weather condition.*

Bay of Bengal Programme
Inter-Governmental Organisation
91 St. Mary's Road, Chennai - 600 018, India. Tel: +91 44 42040024
Email: info@bobpigo.org
www.bobpigo.org