

# FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PLAN

## A. Strategy for Development and Management of Sundarbans Fisheries

### *1. Rationale and Justification*

1. The Sundarban is an important and unique natural resource endowment, characterized by an extensive mangrove forest breeding and nursery ground contiguous with a wide marine shelf receiving significant freshwater discharge. It has a potential for generating substantial benefits in the form of income and economic growth for people using its resources, particularly in the fisheries sector where the Sundarban has a high comparative advantage for brackish water fish production and coastal marine fisheries. The productivity of the Sundarban fisheries resources is however dependent on a fragile and changing ecosystem. Without adequate protection of the ecosystem and sustainable harvesting of the fisheries resources, there is a risk that the Sundarban will fail to reach its full potential for fisheries development. The risk extends to the possibility of collapse of important fisheries resources.

2. The challenge for both resource users and government is to carry "out resource harvesting and full development of aquaculture industries in a sustainable manner so that the natural resources are conserved and the risk of negative impacts and stock collapse is minimized. To achieve a full and vigorous economic development while at the same time effectively conserving natural resources requires a strategic planning process which integrates conservation objectives and initiatives with development programmes and projects. There are a large number of resources user groups and government regulatory and support agencies operating in the Sundarbans with disparate and sometimes conflicting interests. It would be difficult to achieve both conservation and development goals through strategic planning without mechanisms for integration and coordination among these various parties.
  
3. There is a clear need to put into place a strategic planning process for Sundarbans fisheries which has as its key feature mechanisms for integration and coordination of initiatives. The building blocks for such an institutional enhancement are already in place. To date, the Sundarbans has seen a vigorous and diverse fisheries development effort, and the fisheries sector has achieved the level of a major economic performer.

Various government agencies carry out policy formulation and planning for future fisheries management and development in the Sundarbans, while many producer groups have been organized and participate in decision-making forums. What is lacking however is a clear institutional structure for overall strategic planning which must be more than the compilation of individual plans from various agencies, but must be capable of carrying out predictive analysis of cumulative development impacts within the fisheries sector, and between the various economic sectors. In practice, this could be achieved by:

- 1) identifying and empowering one body or agency (through appropriate legislation) with responsibility for managing the strategic planning process and mechanisms for integration and coordination, and
- 2) establishing new institutional bodies (in the form of supervisory and decision-making committees) to participate in the strategic planning process. The result would be to lift sector wide planning processes from the current often ad hoc coordination to a new level of more efficient methodical and regulated planning under conditions of greater transparency, accountability and participation.

## 2. Overview of the Existing Planning Process in the Fisheries Sector

4. Planning within the fisheries sector of West Bengal and area-wise for the Sundarbans (i.e. N24P and S24P districts) is carried out by - and in part, under the auspices of - the DOF. There are six separate planning modalities/systems for different state and national government fiscal budgets :

### (a) Local level fisheries planning ( Panchayat system )

5. This planning system brings local communities into the planning process to identify priority development projects and allocate government finance. The basic planning cell is the gram Panchayat and is composed of representatives of one or more villages (gram sansad). Each gram Panchayat formulates one year and five year plans for development of seven economic sectors, including fisheries and aquaculture. The village plans generally aim to increase fish production and improve socioeconomic conditions in the villages. The village plans are submitted to the next level - the Panchayat samity, which is the planning unit for the development blocks.

The DOF assigns a Fisheries Extension Officer to each, who is responsible for compiling the local plans into a block plan. He also has the task of discussing various options for fisheries development with the villages when they are drafting their village plans. The block plan is then sent to the next level - the Zilla Parishad, which is the planning unit for the district. The block plans are finalized and assembled into a district plan. This is submitted to state government level for approval and financing. The district plans are aggregated into a state plan. The State Planning Board approves the total budget allocation for fisheries for the five year plan and the annual plans. The DOF is then responsible for allocating funds to the districts based on the district and block plans. Implementation of the plans is under the auspices of the district and Panchayat administration. The involvement of the Panchayat is necessary for implementation. The finance comes from two sources: 1) about 80% of the finance comes from the State through the SJGSY and SGSY facilities, and 2) about 20% comes from special project allocations by the Government of India (GOI). NGO play a significant role in administering the implementation of development activities utilizing these funds.

## **(b) DOF development project implementation planning**

6. This planning system prepares and finances special projects identified by DOF officers. Deputy Directors (both Directorate and Zonal) prepare proposals for development projects, based on the needs and opportunities identified by themselves and their service staff. The proposals are submitted quarterly to the Director of Fisheries, who instructs a special technical committee to review and assess the proposals. The committee submits a recommendation to the Director of Fisheries. Once approved by the Director, the proposals are compiled into five year and annual plans, which are submitted to State Government for approval and financing. Once approved the project is implemented by the DOF (or sometimes through one of its subsidiary agencies).

### **(c) DOF administrative budget planning**

7. The DOF prepares budgets for its administration costs. Most of this planning is for relatively mundane expenditures such as staff salaries, office equipment, vehicles and the like. However, of major importance to resource conservation is the fact that fisheries management activities (licensing, patrolling) are financed under this budget.

### **(d) DOF subsidiary fisheries agency planning**

8. Each DOF subsidiary agency (BENFISH, WBFC, SFDC) prepares its own corporate plans for development activities and administration. These are submitted to the Director of Fisheries for assessment. The plans are then sent to DFAARFH for approval. Brackish water Fish Farmers Development Agency (BFOA) and Fish Farmers Development Agency (FFDA) also prepare corporate plans, which are sent directly to DFAARFH for approval.

### **(e) DFAARFH planning**

9. Plans for large fisheries projects with large budgets (i.e. World Bank loan, East Kolkata wetlands) are prepared at Secretariat level (with the assistance of the DOF). These are submitted to the State Government for approval. Other line agencies of the State Government (i.e. FD, Department of Agriculture, etc) and GOI agencies may also be involved in such projects.

### **(f) National government fisheries agencies planning**

10. National agencies such as MPEDA and CIFRI prepare plans for fisheries development schemes and related fisheries management activities in West Bengal. These are submitted to the DOF for assessment and approval before being implemented.

11. Integration of fisheries plans with the plans and programmes of non-fisheries state line agencies is carried out in two ways:

One-on-one collaboration: Line agencies in other economic sectors occasionally submit proposals to the DOF for implementation.

The Committee of Ministers of the State Government: This committee integrates plans, programmes and projects between line agencies.

12. The DOF planning process interacts with the SDB primarily at the Panchayat level. The DOF does not submit its plans to the SDB for review, assessment or approval.

### **3. *Proposed Role for SDB in Fisheries planning and Implementation***

#### **(a) General aspects**

13. The existing process for fisheries development planning by the state government line agency (DOF) appears to be quite comprehensive and technically sound. Clearly, the DOF and its subsidiary agencies have been able to effect significant development progress in the fisheries sector of West Bengal, a substantial proportion of which has taken place in the Sundarbans.<sup>1</sup> Little is to be gained by attempting to shift (or duplicate) the functions currently being carried out by the DOF and its subsidiary agencies over to the SDB.

14. However, it is the opinion of the Consultants, after assessment of the sector and discussion with officials of the SDB, DOF, FD and other agencies, that the SDB could play a very useful role to bring about certain improvements to the fisheries development and management planning process for the Sundarban. These are in four principal areas:

- Integration between economic sectors.
- Planning for fisheries management and development.
- Implementation of priority fisheries projects.
- Implementation of fisheries management.