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INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN SUPPORT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 1995 FAO CODE OF CONDUCT FOR RESPONSIBLE FISHERIES

1. Underpinning the implementation of the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (the Code), as recognized in Articles 7 to 12, is the need for two broad categories of information: general information about the Code (its goals, coverage, etc.) and specialized and technical information to support research, resource management and use, policy and development. Many FAO Members, in particular developing countries, have indicated that the lack of access to timely, relevant and accurate information is a serious constraint to the implementation of the Code.
2. FAO has undertaken activities to gain a better understanding of the challenges and to propose mechanisms to improve long-term access and sharing of essential information. During 2002 and 2003 the FAO Fisheries Library worked with a group of national fisheries institutions in Africa to determine accessibility of the required information.¹ A follow-up study in 2004 drew attention to the diversity of the information required and its availability to stakeholders charged with responsible fisheries management.² To discuss these issues and possible solutions in a wider forum, FAO hosted the 31st Conference of the International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers (IAMSLIC) in 2005.³

¹ FAO. 2004. Report of and papers presented at the Regional Workshop on Networking for Improved Access to Fisheries and Aquaculture Information in Africa. Grahamstown, South Africa, 3-7 November 2003. FAO Fisheries Report, No. 740. Rome. 232 pp. (also available at <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/007/y5519b/y5519b00.pdf>)

² Webster, J.G. and Collins, J. 2005. Fisheries information in developing countries: support to the implementation of the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. FAO Fisheries Circular, No. 1006, Rome. FAO. 127p. (also available at <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/007/y5847e/y5847e00.pdf>)

³ IAMSLIC. 2006. Information for responsible fisheries: libraries as mediators Anderson, K.L. and Thiery, C. (eds.) Proceedings of the 31st IAMSLIC Conference, FAO, Rome, Italy, October 10 – 14, 2005. Fort Pierce, Florida. IAMSLIC. 321 pp. (also available at <https://darchive.mblwhoilibrary.org/handle/1912/435>)

3. Feedback from Members also indicates that access is just one of a series of related information problems. Limited opportunities to publish and disseminate fisheries information in developing countries is leading to a serious and growing under-representation of their research within the scientific literature. The unavailability of the results of research and management from countries with some of the major problems potentially weakens the future for responsible fisheries. Digital publishing and dissemination offers new opportunities in places with reliable and affordable internet access. FAO has produced Guidelines on Digital Publishing aimed at smaller fisheries institutions with limited resources. They provide advice on introducing Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) and the practicalities of establishing and maintaining a digital publishing and dissemination system.⁴

4. Fisheries management information is published largely as grey literature that is often difficult to discover and access. Fishery management plans, policy guidelines, scientific and technical institutional publications can be difficult to find without knowledge of the originating agency. In an attempt to improve access to this information FAO is supporting the development of the Aquatic Commons <<http://aquacom.fcla.edu>>. This is a thematic digital repository managed by IAMSLIC to facilitate the exchange of aquatic science research and management information and to offer repository services where local, stable Information Technology support is lacking. This includes the many fisheries organizations and institutions that have web site publishing but do not have a repository. This initiative was welcomed by the FAO Advisory Committee on Fisheries Research at its sixth session in 2006.⁵

5. In order to highlight the many issues involved in information and knowledge sharing in the context of the Code, FAO has elaborated Technical Guidelines,⁶ paying particular attention to the needs of developing countries. A section devoted to small-scale fisheries and aquaculture recognizes the special situation and information needs of the sub-sector.

6. The following table summarizes information constraints in developing countries and proposed actions for countries, institutions and donors to address them.

Information constraints in developing countries and actions proposed

Constraint	Action proposed
Lack of awareness of, and access to, global information resources.	Existing library networks offer an efficient and cost-effective means to share information and expertise: they enhance access to the global information resources required for fisheries and aquaculture management.
Inadequate ICT infrastructure and information skills.	Assistance is required by developing country fisheries institutions to ensure adequate and appropriate ICT infrastructure and human capacity development to become equal partners in information networks.
Poor opportunities to publish and disseminate the results of research, resulting in duplication and waste of scarce resources.	Programmes to strengthen institutions and research capacity should include the funding and mandate to support the publication, dissemination and sharing of research.

⁴Wilkinson, S. and Collins, J. 2007. Guidelines on digital publishing: A practical approach for small organizations with limited resources. Fish Code Review, No. 20, Rome. FAO. 77p. (also available at <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/a0976e/a0976e00.pdf>)

⁵ FAO. 2007a. Report of the sixth session of the Advisory Committee on Fisheries Research, Rome, 17–20 October 2006. FAO Fisheries Report No. 812. 21 pp. (also available at <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/009/a0943e/a0943e00.pdf>)

⁶ FAO. 2009. Information and knowledge sharing. FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries, No. 12. Rome.

<p>Difficult to discover and obtain fisheries management information and share the lessons learned by those in similar situations.</p> <p>Lack of access to historical and baseline information; Information lost to future generations.</p>	<p>Fisheries organizations and institutions should ensure long-term, open access to the results of their research and management for the benefit of the global community and future generations. Shared thematic digital repositories such as the Aquatic Commons offer a solution.</p>
<p>Lack of information about the socio-economic and cultural aspects of small-scale fisheries communities remains a major obstacle to informed decision- and policy-making.</p>	<p>Countries should identify and address information gaps, noting in particular the need for better socio-economic data.</p>
<p>Available information is not relevant in terms of its affordability, timeliness and presentation in languages and contexts that users can relate to, understand and benefit from.</p>	<p>Information providers should ensure delivery of information in appropriate formats and language to meet context-specific needs.</p>
<p>Information that is scattered between various government agencies, scientific and academic institutions, and industry is not readily available to small-scale fishing communities, inhibiting their full and effective participation in managing fisheries.</p>	<p>The transfer or sharing of information resources and skills from the institutions of centralized management to smaller, geographically and socially diverse groups should be an integral part of decentralized and participatory management arrangements.</p>

Conclusion

7. Urgent action is needed to enable all stakeholders to have access and contribute to the flow of information to achieve responsible fisheries management. This issue is fundamental to the implementation of the Code, especially in developing countries.