

FAO Workshop on Child Labour in Fisheries and Aquaculture in cooperation with ILO

Rome, 14-16 April 2010

**Opening Address
by
Mr Ichiro Nomura
Assistant Director-General
Fisheries and Aquaculture Department**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to Rome and welcome to FAO.

I'm very grateful that you have accepted our invitation to participate in the Workshop on Child Labour in Fisheries and Aquaculture. The workshop has been convened by FAO in cooperation with ILO - the International Labour Organization. In addition to our colleagues from ILO, staff of the FAO Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division of the Economic and Social Development Department have played a key role in the organization of this workshop. The Fisheries and Aquaculture Department has a longstanding cooperation with ILO in the area of working conditions in fishing including safety at sea aspects. I'm very pleased that our cooperation now also includes the important area of tackling child labour in fisheries and aquaculture. This is in line with FAO's participation in the international agricultural partnership for fighting child labour in agriculture which in addition to FAO, includes the ILO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR); International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP); and International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF). This workshop may be the beginning to extend this partnership to include also organizations from fisheries and aquaculture.

The issue of child labour in fisheries and aquaculture has likely received inadequate attention in the work of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department. It has never been subject of discussion in the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) which is the technical governing body of FAO dealing with fisheries and aquaculture. However, soon COFI will be asked to adopt aquaculture certification guidelines that include among its minimum substantive requirements a provision stating that: *Child labour should not be used in a manner inconsistent with ILO conventions and international standards*. The importance of these certification guidelines cannot be underestimated as experience shows a significant influence of internationally agreed guidelines on voluntary certification or labelling schemes and thus producers and consumers alike. This is especially the case in fish and fishery products which are among the most traded food products globally.

Among our field projects, the UK DFID-funded Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Project (SFLP) in West Africa was one of the few that did some investigations on child labour in fisheries. These suggested the need for a better understanding of the links between poverty, childrens' work and child labour within fishing communities. From other research we know

that the quality of schooling is another factor that has an influence on whether children attend school or engage in work.

While data are scarce on the incidence and nature of child labour in fisheries and aquaculture, merely on the basis of numbers, it surely is most widespread in the small-scale subsectors of capture fisheries, aquaculture and post-harvest fish processing, distribution and marketing. These small-scale sectors are believed to provide over 90 percent of the estimated above 120 million direct and indirect fisheries livelihoods that support more than 500 million people or about 8 percent of the world population.

Any visit to a busy beach-landing site in West Africa, South Asia or Central America would show children engaged in helping to unload fish and it would not be unusual to find pirogues or kattumarans or canoas with some children or youth among the crew. Then when returning to the next hamlet or town it would be quite common to see young girls alone or next to their mothers transporting, washing, sorting and selling fish. On the way, when passing some fish ponds in say a Southeast Asian country, we may observe children and youth throw feed into a pond or sit with a rod and hook & line to angle a fish or two or more for lunch or dinner. These highly visible encounters with working children in fisheries and aquaculture are likely the more benevolent types while the most exploitative, abusive and hazardous practices remain out of sight. But for the uninformed outsider even the harmless appearing trading of fish between the owner of a canoe and a youth may hide an underlying abusive relationship fuelled by asymmetric distribution of power and wealth and might hide the fact that some of these children do not go to school.

I do not wish to dwell further into a matter for which you are here. You will discuss these issues in detail and provide guidance to FAO and ILO in our quest to develop good practices guidance, awareness raising materials and to recommend action to specifically tackle child labour in fisheries and aquaculture.

Before ending I should not fail to express my gratitude to the Governments of the Netherlands and Norway which through their funding have made the convening of this workshop possible.

Wishing you a productive meeting and a nice stay in Rome.