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RESEARCH

Working together in small-scale fisheries: harnessing collective action for poverty eradication

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Abstract
This paper builds on lessons learned from case studies of organization-building and collective action as a means of eradicating poverty in small-scale fisheries. The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, endorsed by FAO Member States in 2014, recognize that addressing poverty depends in large measure upon the collective agency of small-scale fishers and fish workers themselves. We first discuss the nature of poverty in small-scale fisheries and argue that lack of rights and debilitating power relations are among the factors contributing to poverty. Secondly, the paper explores the possibilities of collective action and suggests that the support—but not the domination—of government and civil society is crucial. Finally, we look into the characteristics of fisher and fish worker organizations and emphasize the importance of autonomous decision making, and the need to address internal obstacles and opportunities, including those related to gender.

Introduction

Small-scale fisheries globally contribute to food security and sustainable livelihoods in marine and inland communities (FAO 2016). They are also a considerable source of wealth. However, participants in small-scale fisheries often do not reap the benefits of the contributions they make. Instead, they struggle to provide for their families and communities, under the stress that comes from poverty, powerlessness, and marginalization. Such situations have several explanations and would require multiple remedies to correct. As outlined in the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (henceforth SSF Guidelines), endorsed by FAO Member States in 2014, the remedies include secure tenure, access to fairer markets, better education, improved health services, and different measures to create equity and repair power imbalances, such as between genders, all championed within a human rights framework.

As argued in the SSF Guidelines, poverty eradication in small-scale fisheries must involve the collective effort of a broad set of actors. Thus, the SSF Guidelines address state governments, civil society organizations, and academia alike as responsible for their implementation. However, it is clear that successful implementation relies largely on the mobilization of small-scale fishers and fish workers[1] themselves. This process in turn depends on the creation of representative organizations that can mobilize their participation and act on their behalf (Kalikoski and Franz 2014; FAO 2015).

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[1] "Fishers and fish workers" are the term used by FAO to emphasize the need to include people involved both harvest and post-harvest activities. We will use the same term throughout this paper.

Globally, small-scale fisheries display enormous diversity and cultural richness. Simple approaches to poverty eradication that can be applied uniformly across the world are therefore hard to come by. Hence, as a guiding principle (No. 13), the SSF Guidelines posit that "[p]olicies, strategies, plans and actions for improving small-scale fisheries governance and development…should be informed by existing conditions, implementable and adaptable to changing circumstances, and should support community resilience…"

Even if one cannot generalize from individual case studies in a statistical sense, one can still learn from them (George and Bennett 2005), especially when they are analyzed in relation to a broader literature, which is what the papers in this thematic series attempt to do. Case studies delve into the particularities of situations, events, and locations. However, they are still examples of issues that are beyond the particular empirical case, such as poverty eradication and collective action (Flyvbjerg 2001).

The overriding question explored in this paper is how poverty eradication in small-scale fisheries can benefit from collective action and the establishment of member-based organizations. Such organizations, be they cooperatives and societies, associations and unions, or hybrid and networked associations (Kurien 2014), can be formal or informal, and modern or pre-modern in nature. Here, collective action is simply understood as people, such as fishers and/or fish workers, in some instances in partnership with others, purposively joining for a common cause.[2] Building organizations for such a cause is part of what is considered as collective action, because, as Miller (2014) argues, the most complex form of collective action requires organization, because it includes planning, mobilizing, and monitoring.

FAO sees the following benefits of organizations:

> For small-scale fishers and fish workers, the benefits of being part of an organization include: (i) experiencing a sense of belonging and identity; (ii) generating market power for better opportunities as well as for devising the ways and means to obtain the best return for the products of their labour; (iii) being involved in developing policies to improve the fisheries sector; and (iv) conservation of the fishery resources and protection of their ecosystems (SOFIA 2016: 122).

The thematic series of which this paper is part contains in-depth descriptions and analyses of what such fisher and fish worker organizations actually do. It also provides understanding on how organizations originated, who initiated them, and why. What problems were they meant to solve and what were the challenges in addressing them? Why were they formed the way they were? How have they changed over time? In addition, this thematic series[3] contains enquiries into the availability of linkages with other organizations at the local and regional levels, including government. Government is sometimes understood to be the actor that initiates and leads collective action, especially when legal matters are brought into question, while in other cases it trails behind.

The umbrella argument of the paper is that the engagement of small-scale fisher and fish workers in collective action is a crucial step towards empowering poor and vulnerable communities. Such empowerment is both an objective in itself and a means for securing rights to access pro-poor growth and poverty reduction strategies (Ravaillon 2004), inclusive value chains (Helmsing and Vellema 2011), and inclusive development (Gupta et al. 2014). In the following, the nexus between collective action and poverty eradication is analyzed through three lenses. The first lens considers the composite nature of poverty and the challenges of establishing causes and effects. Secondly, attention turns to the dynamics of collective action. The third lens regards the building of organizations as a process capable of breaking the vicious cycle of poverty.

Poverty as a multi-dimensional concept

Although poverty is an individual experience, it is also a social (structural, institutional, relational, cultural, and political) issue. As a social issue, poverty is not a stand-alone concept, but closely connected with other concepts that aim to capture its causes, meaning, and consequences. By having consequences, poverty is likewise a cause. Poverty is viewed not from an income perspective alone, but as a composite of disabling conditions and lack of capabilities and functionings (Alkire 2008; Sen 1999; Spicker 1999; Stanford et al. 2014).

Poverty can be perceived in absolute terms, as a series of deficiencies and incapacities, and in relative terms, like in comparison with the national average. Small-scale fishers and fish workers in the North are generally not as poor as their counterparts in the South. The former usually live in countries with better functioning economies, and may be able to obtain better welfare services. Still, they often find themselves at the bottom of the occupational income ranking. As their counterparts in the global south, they are often victims of marginalization, understood as social exclusion, powerlessness, lack of voice, and disconnection to territory and culture (Jentoft and Eide 2011; Gyader et al. 2013).

From a social justice perspective (Sen 2006), it makes a difference if you are one of many or the only one in your

[2] For more extensive, theoretical perspectives on collective action, see Olson (1971), Hardin 1982: Tilly (1978), Ostrom (2001), and Miller (2014).

[3] The thematic series contains case studies from Barbados, Costa Rica, India, Indonesia, Norway, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, and the USA.

environment who is poor. In their case study from Barbados, Patrick McConney and co-authors (2017) suggest that small-scale fishers are less recognized and entitled than workers in other economic sectors, even if income or food poverty are not major issues. The Barbados National Union of Fisherfolk Organisations therefore seeks to provide a platform that allows members to voice their concerns in national fisheries policy processes.

Alonso-Población and colleagues (2018) report on the revitalization of *Tara Bandu* (a seasonal ban and ritual) in Timor-Leste as a means to gain a greater role in coastal governance. In a context in which power is largely shaped by narratives (Alonso-Población and Fidalgo-Castro 2014) and where urban elites dominate state bodies, the narrative capital of individuals and communities is of crucial importance for their empowerment. In this context, the fishing community of Biacou worked collectively to regain control over natural resources management by codifying their local origin narrative about who came there first, and by revitalizing their traditional *Tara Bandu* for management purposes.

In an influential article, Christophe Béné (2003) noted that small-scale fisheries "rhymes with poverty." Fisher poverty is not only empirical reality, but also about to the way small-scale fishers are often perceived relative to other sectors. According to this imagery, small-scale fishing is "an occupation of last resort," i.e., what people do when they have no other way of sustaining themselves (Onyango 2011). Following this perception, the policy solution for small-scale fishers and fish workers would be to move them into some other more lucrative employment. The assumption here is also that poor fishers are bad stewards. Removing them from this industry would therefore be a win-win strategy: good for the people, the environment, and the society at large. From this perspective, it only makes sense to expedite their exit. In the global South, however, the number of people employed in small-scale fisheries has actually increased, mostly due to their opportunities relative to other industries in their hinterlands (Bavinck 2011, 2014).

However, from an ecological, economic, and social perspective, the trends in both the North and South are problematic. One issue is the stress that substantial population increases or decreases bring on small-scale fisheries communities. Another is the pressure on marine resources, as both trends are associated with overfishing—one by the increasing number of people involved and the other by the introduction of competitive, large-scale fishing technology to the detriment of small-scale fisheries. Therefore, the SSF Guidelines are relevant to small-scale fisheries in the South as well as the North.

The validity of the assumption that small-scale fishers are bad stewards is, however, questionable (for a recent overview, see Bennet et al. 2018). Given the right conditions, some of which are institutional, small-scale fishers can be effective managers of common resources (Solis Rivera et al., 2017; Child 2018; McConney et al. 2014; Medeiros et al. 2014; Kurien 2007; Ostrom 1990; Berkes et al. 1989). Moreover, with conducive institutional infrastructure, small-scale fisheries can also yield sufficient incomes and sustainable livelihoods (Jentoft and Finstad 2018). Small-scale fisheries are often experienced as a preferable way of life (Onyango 2011; Urquhart et al. 2014).

In the past century, world fisheries have created immense wealth (Eide et al. 2011; Sinan and Whitmarsh 2010). Poverty is often the other side of the process of wealth generation and a distributional issue, which results when wealth accrues to fisheries elites at the expense of small-scale fishers (Eide et al. 2011). Then, wealth creation brings along issues of justice (Jentoft 2013). Such injustices have sometimes precipitated the establishment of new fisher movements and organization at local, national, and even international levels (Johnson 2006; Kurien 1988; Sundar 2012).

However, poverty is also patterned by the nature of wealth generation in a society as a whole, and must therefore be situated within this larger context. Social, cultural, and economic barriers, which are not specific to small-scale fisheries, can be important debilitating factors (levels of education, governance failures, corruption, to name a few). Still, even places in the world that have exhibited high levels of human development, such as in Kerala, India, fishing communities, have been "outliers" due to a multiplicity of factors—historical, political, social, and organizational—until they organized collectively (Kurien 2000). In South Africa, which has been deeply affected by Apartheid, race is a factor that continues to underpin policies (see Sunde et al. 2014). Solís Rivera and co-authors as well as Child (2018) argue that in Costa Rica and North Carolina, the spatial location of fishing communities is a debilitating condition.

Small-scale fishing communities thus find themselves at the receiving end of societal forces that lead to their marginalization, vulnerability, and poverty. Collective action and organization-building then become an expression of counter--action, a "weapon of the weak" (Campling et al. 2012; Scott 1987; Isaacs 2003: Scholtens 2016), through which people collectively resist the circumstances that limit their freedoms (Sen 1999). Collective action helps to level the playing field when poor fishers and fish workers get control of their resources, services, and markets, and have their voice heard. Through collective action, fishers and fish workers procure the means to free themselves from the exploitation of more powerful actors, such as large-scale fishers, merchant-financiers, and landowners. The papers included in the thematic series provide examples of how this has and can been done. Poverty, and the problems associated with it, is often an incentive to undertake collective action. As illustrated in the Norwegian case study by Jentoft and Finstad (2018), what may start as a spontaneous event results in institutional innovation and social transformation. What begins locally

eventually becomes a national theme. The Norwegian case is not just about material wellbeing, but also a relational issue, and the wellbeing that comes from the experience of being treated fairly (Johnson et al. 2017; Sen 2009; Jentoft 2013).

Dynamics of Collective Action

In this section, we discuss factors influencing the likelihood and direction of collective action taking place, highlighting the aspects that complicate and impede such a process. Continuing on the topics raised earlier, we highlight problems in identifying the causes and effects of poverty. We also address the multiple dimensions poverty, which create difficulties in deciding on a relevant course of action. The section commences with an examination of the role unequal power relations play in collective action. Paragraph 7.1 of the SSF Guidelines therefore stresses the importance of "recognizing that there are sometimes unequal power relationships between value chain actors and that vulnerable and marginalized groups may require special support." It is clear that unequal power relationships within small-scale fisheries are not easy to change, also because the kind of leadership necessary for collective action is not always available (Baland et al. 2006).

Historically, an important trigger for collective action has been small-scale fishers' resolve to fight against exploitative forces, such as excessive merchant power, coercive authorities, or unwanted forms of technology (DuBois and Zografos 2012). Yet their struggles have often been flawed for multiple reasons, including a weak asset base and lack of trust (Stanford et al. 2014). Small-scale fishers and fish workers tend to be poorly organized to begin with, partly due to the geographic remoteness of communities and the low socio-political status of the fishing occupation. Forming and running a formal organization requires resources, experience, and skills (such as literacy), which poor and marginalized small-scale fisheries do not always possess. Furthermore, the feeble structure and leadership of organizations can result in internal conflicts and in small-scale fishers and fish workers becoming victims of vested interests. The fact that fishers frequently perceive their own situation as a zero-sum game (Alonso-Población 2014) governed by the rules of competition instead of cooperation and norms of altruism also hinders collective endeavors and the search for common goals (cf. Acheson 1981).

Securing the tenure rights of small-scale fisheries, as the SSF Guidelines aim for, is therefore an essential condition for sustaining the material base as well as the fishing culture (see also Cordell 1989; FAO 2012). The open or quasi-open access to fishery resources may put small-scale fishers at odds with other actors, a struggle they often lose (FAO 2002). "Ocean grabbing" (Bennett et al. 2015) and "coastal grabbing" (Bavinck et al. 2017) are descriptors of this phenomenon, whereby powerful outside players claim resources and occupy ocean space that small-scale fishers depend on. Poverty eradication, collective action, and organization in small-scale fisheries therefore cannot be analyzed without a view on social conflict and power. In recognition, hereof, the SSF Guidelines (in paragraph 5.9): proclaim: "States should recognize that competition from other users is increasing within small-scale fisheries areas and that small-scale fishing communities, in particular vulnerable and marginalized groups, are often the weaker party in conflicts with other sectors and may require special support if their livelihoods are threatened by the development and activities of other sectors."

What makes poverty in small-scale fisheries hard to define, explain, and eliminate is that not only are there multiple causes,[4] but poverty is also a multifaceted concept (Béné and Friend 2011). The SSF Guidelines mention low income as only one of several attributes, which include low literacy, lack of health services, unstable employment, inadequate housing, unsecure rights, and no political voice. It is important to distinguish the chronic from the transitory or seasonal poor. The former type includes those individuals who live below the poverty line for a long period, sometimes for several generations, whereas the latter includes those who move in and out of poverty. The chronically poor tend to be trapped in structural conditions, like unfavorable power relations, that make escape difficult. Women may be poor for different reasons than men, often related to gendered power relations and differential access to resources.

Béné (2003) discussed fisher poverty as both a cause and effect. Fishers may be poor because they fish, or they fish because they are poor. In the first instance, poverty eradication might focus on curbing fishing efforts to secure the resource from overfishing, and thus loss of income and food security. This recipe is in line with the thinking of Garrett Hardin (1968). In the second instance, one would look for reasons why people are poor in the first place. These reasons may have nothing to do with fishing operations per se, but a result of crises in other livelihoods (agricultural, livestock, or others) or an outcome of how communities are organized, access is distributed, markets function, and so forth. This way of reasoning is in line with the idea of "fishing as a last resort occupation," mentioned above.

[4] FAO perceives root causes of poverty "in small-scale fishing communities to be "associated with a number of factors. Among these factors are as follows: the harvest nature of the production process; the high perishability of the product; the relatively higher capital investment needed for production, and the associated higher risks; the relative isolation of fishers' work space from mainstream society; and the dangerous nature of the occupation and the uncertainties associated with the state of resources, which create fears and vulnerability" (SOFIA 2016a: 122).

Overfishing, and hence poverty, may be due to the political and institutional circumstances in which fishers operate. The primary cause of poverty of small-scale fisheries is therefore not necessarily related to the availability of natural resources (fish, land) and technology (fishing and processing assets). Instead, poverty in small-scale fisheries may be caused by the lack of rights or means to access these resources. Other factors such as poor prices for their products, and exploitative economic and social relations, also count. As noted above, small-scale fishers and fish workers are often tied to other actors, such as merchant-financiers, who, through a process of interlocking of markets (for credit, inputs, and outputs), are able to perpetuate their stranglehold. This way of reasoning would be in line Amartya Sen (Sen 1999; see also Jentoft et al. 2010). When poverty is the cause (or a result of factors that have nothing to do with overfishing), collective action would have a broader agenda than fishing, like those that the SSF Guidelines are supporting: policies directly aimed at advancing human development and rights, including community wellbeing and the freedoms that Sen is examining. When, on the other hand, poverty results from overfishing, collective action would imply the controlling, and curbing of fishing efforts.

The SSF Guidelines propose co-management as a suitable means for this endeavor. If such co-management arrangements are missing, as they were in Tanzania's Lake Victoria fisheries until the Beach Management Units (BMU) were established, they would first need to be formed (see Onyango 2018). The BMUs are forums through which fishers exercise their right to organize, participate in development, and make decisions that affect their livelihoods. In addition, they serve as vital instruments of resource management. According to Onyango, the BMUs are a work in progress, evolving gradually through the interaction of the communities and government.

The SSF Guidelines emphasize the role of natural disaster and climate change in the context of poverty eradication and food security, and that both adaptation and mitigation require collective action. Whatever material assets small-scale fishers and fish workers have accumulated may be swept away during a cyclone or flood, leaving people to have to start their lives all over again. Islam and Jentoft (2017) find this to be a common predicament of fishing communities in coastal lowlands of Bangladesh. The effects of natural disaster stand center stage in Kurien's paper (2017), which is about the devastation caused by the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia's Aceh Province. His study depicts the approaches adopted in initiating an organizational innovation process in the post-tsunami situation, which crucially involved the establishment of co-management institutions. In this vein, Bavinck and Vivekanandan as well as Alonso-Población and colleagues (2018) report on the revitalization of pre-modern organizations in times of crisis. The first paper analyzes the changing role of informal village councils, or *ur panchayat*, following the 2004 tsunami in southern India. The latter, as mentioned, considers the case of *Tara Bandu*, a custom-based mechanism for resource governance, in post-conflict Timor-Leste.

Reducing fishing effort as a management effort may be good for the resource but will only help to sustain small-scale fisheries communities if accompanied by social policies and poverty reduction strategies. For instance, fisheries closures may not work if people have no alternative ways of sustaining themselves. Kalikoski and Vasconcellos (2012) assess how the unemployment benefits given to small-scale fishing households during closed seasons became an important safety net for fishers and their families in the Patos Lagoon of southern Brazil. They argue that if poverty eradication and development policies are not part of the overall governance of fisheries, also in the context of climate change adaptation, the sector could undergo change that particularly disadvantage the poor. Denying poor people the opportunity to feed themselves is, from the viewpoint of international law, a human rights violation.

To avoid hurting those who fisheries management measures mean to save, one might also look for other ways of curbing fishing effort, like privileging small-scale fisheries and restricting industrial fisheries. Such an approach fits well with the notion of "technological subsidiarity," which decrees that all fishing that can be done by small-scale means, should actually be done so responsibly, thereby eliminating large-scale fisheries from fishing grounds for which small-scale fishers are stewards (Mathew 2005). Such an approach could be successful as small-scale fisheries are most often not the main cause of resource degradation (Pauly 2018). Instead of too many fishers chasing too few fish, the reason for overexploited resources is that there are often "roving bandits" (Berkes et al. 2006) with industrial fishing encroaching areas where small-scale fishers operate (Chuenpagdee et al. 2005). Importantly, the SSF Guidelines do support the idea of "special treatment" of small-scale fishers and fish workers vis-à-vis industrial fisheries. Investigations into the global distribution of subsidies to fisheries suggest, however, that it is currently the latter sector that gets special treatment (Schuhbauer et al. 2017).

The idea of poverty as a trap is that the consequences of poverty can also be its causes. Therefore, one needs to be equally concerned with the mechanisms that make people ascend from and descend into poverty. As noted in the previous section, poverty has multiple origins and dimensions, and addressing it therefore calls for a broad approach. The SSF Guidelines (paragraph 10.5) posit that "[s]tates should establish and promote … holistic and inclusive ecosystem approaches in the fisheries sector." Further, in paragraph 6.1: "All parties should consider integrated, ecosystem and holistic approaches to small-scale fisheries management and

development that take the complexity of livelihoods into account." Managing fishing operations is but one function for which fisher governors take responsibility (Kurien 2014). Case studies included in this thematic series, such as the ones by Bavinck and Vivekanandan and Child, as well as Solis Rivera and colleagues, offer illustrations of such comprehensive action sets. After all, poverty eradication strategies in small-scale fisheries must involve other institutions and sectors than just those with a specialized fisheries mandate.

Organizations for Collective Action

This section discusses three aspects of organization building in small-scale fisheries. The first is the genesis of organizations, and the manner in which they are facilitated. The second topic concerns consequences of the fact that small-scale fisher and fish worker organizations frequently inhabit societal spaces characterized by legal pluralism, which has implications for their ability to achieve results. Finally, the section considers the challenges that gender inequalities pose to organizational structures and processes.

Collective action may be spontaneous or result from a deliberate plan (Miller 2014). It always happens within a context, which influences its avenues and outcomes. Sometimes, it is a pro-action to new opportunities, sometimes a re-action to a shared problem, like injustice, as with a class revolt. It often builds on a sense of common social identity. Typically, it involves a series of events, starting locally but later growing and spreading. A narrow purpose may expand, as when an organization takes on new functions, as illustrated in the Norwegian case by Jentoft and Finstad (2018), where the organization that was formed for solving a conflict over landing prices proved to be a handy tool for resource management too.

In small-scale fisheries, organizations like cooperatives are often formed for correcting power imbalances within the sector as well as vis-à-vis other sectors (Amarasinghe and Bavinck 2017). However, over time, they may assume a broader set of functions that help to build community resilience. For that, organizations may be in need capacity-building, finance, legal backing, and policies that enable them to work more broadly. The influence of cooperatives on the fishing sector also depends on the size of their membership, and their ability to mobilize and recruit members. At some later stage, they may gather into larger units such as federations. The case of Japan where cooperatives are the norm is outstanding in this regard (Kurien 2014; Delaney 2015). With increasing scale, such federations become players in arenas beyond the particular community, which is truly the case with the Norwegian cooperative sales organizations portrayed by Jentoft and Finstad (2018).

For collective action to become a means for poverty eradication, it must be fostered. Someone must take initiative and the lead. Such leadership can emerge from within the fishing community, such as in the case of the *ur panchayats* in India (Bavinck and Vivekanandan 2017) and in the case of CoopeTárcoles in Costa Rica (Solis Rivera et al., 2017). Local small-scale fisheries organizations may also be initiated from the outside, by civil society organizations, or government authorities (Jentoft 1986).

The SSF Guidelines emphasize that states and civil society organizations have a responsibility for facilitating collective action, which sometimes undergoes difficulty in developing on its own, as Mancur Olson (1971) explained. People have an incentive to remain passive, as they gain from the collective benefits provided regardless of their contribution. Free riders hamper collective action as they discourage others to take action. In Norway, in order to curb free-riding incentives, membership in cooperative sales organizations was made mandatory by law; bypassing them was deemed a legal offense. This made the cooperative sales organizations not just powerful but also effective. To the contrary, the effectiveness of producer organizations within EU fisheries is lessened by not having a similar monopsony right (Jentoft 1989). If organizations have to prove their existence vis-à-vis reluctant members, they are bound to have a slow start and a cumbersome existence, unless an external sponsor provides strong incentives.

Collective action for the realization of a common goal by means of an organization requires the creation of awareness. Members must believe in their own collective potential and that the goal is within reach. The higher the expectation and the stronger the identification, the easier the task. A committed and loyal membership is an asset for any organization. In some instances, organizational innovation is required, because people may have had negative experiences from previous endeavors, as demonstrated by Solis Rivera and colleagues (2017). In many countries, cooperatives were set up with political goals (as channeling state aid), sometimes as part of a state-run process. They therefore did not always enthuse members sufficiently, and thereby failed (Jentoft 1986; Kurien 2014).

Poor and marginalized small-scale fishers and fish workers would obviously benefit from cooperation, but cooperation can take many forms, and not necessarily be a producer cooperative in the formal sense. Anna Child (2018) illustrates this in her the case study of the Ocracoke Working Watermen's Association (OWWA) in North Carolina, USA. Here, fishers considered the cooperative model, but found another organizational set-up more appropriate. This was also the case in John Kurien's case study on Aceh, Indonesia (2017), where a hybrid co-management design was chosen to fit the local context.

Small-scale fisheries organizations must necessarily be adapted to the context in which they operate. Although the classic cooperative (Rochdale) principles (Kurien 2014) of open membership, democratic control, and serving the common good provide a useful guide, institutional implementations tend to vary from place to place.[5] It is possible to be true to the governance principles of cooperatives, but pragmatic as far as the organizational design is concerned. In the case study by Child (2018), many of the cooperative principles are included without the organization being a cooperative in a classic sense.

Regardless of how recent and unique organizations are, they emerge in particular circumstances. In some instances, they have a deep history, and may have undergone changes in ways that have allowed them to survive and thrive. Still, they may have maintained original features. This raises a number of interesting research questions, such as the following: What were the conditions that led people collectively to form them? What functions have organizations played for the fishing communities in question? What is their relationship with government? What is unique about the origin of organizations, and what internal or external factors explain their failure or success in breaking poverty traps? It is particularly important to understand how organizations learn and innovate—and how such innovations spread.

Notably, new undertakings do not have to represent a clean break from the past, but rather build on customary and existing organizational forms. Old and new patterns of organization may occur side by side, perhaps with occasional frictions, or in a fruitful, synergistic relationship. Contributors to this thematic series mention traditional knowledge that allows people to maintain their sea-related, orally transmitted culture, also in the context of organizational innovation. There is, however, a risk that new organizational reforms, including resource management systems, may erode this knowledge base, and the cultural identity that is associated with it. Science may well have this effect, but also bring healthy tension between knowledge systems.

Parallel systems of law may also permeate small-scale fisheries (Benda-Beckmann et al. 2009; Bavinck and Gupta 2014). Legal systems (norms, rules) originate from various sources, including international agencies, governments, and fisher organizations. Alternative visions of the substance and procedures of law are seen to fuel collective action, motivating fishers to seek justice on their own terms. Customary fisher law can therefore become a rallying point, a motivator, and a point of reference for collective action. In recognition of these circumstances, the SSF Guidelines emphasize that "[l]ocal norms and practices, as well as customary or otherwise preferential access to fishery resources and land by small-scale fishing communities including indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, should be recognized, respected and protected in ways that are consistent with international human rights law" (paragraph 5.4). This reads as a proposal for legal reform. Whether the implementation of this norm would involve more or less legal pluralism, and what implications it has for small-scale fishers and fish workers, is an important, subsequent research question (Benda-Beckmann et al. 2009).

The case studies included in this thematic series provide various examples of customary law. In the Timor-Leste case study of the *Tara Bandu*, Enrique Alonso-Población and co-authors (2018) argue that in circumstances where mainstream resource management cannot be implemented, there may be opportunities to strengthen hybrid, custom-based institutions for the purpose of sustainable and cost-effective use of coastal and marine resources. The *Tara Bandu* case study also illustrates the multiple dimensions of poverty and the cultural roots of social systems. In Timor-Leste, individual and collective authority is still largely determined by the possession of origin narratives.

Bavinck and Vivekanandan's paper (2017) about the Indian *ur panchayat* offers another example. Here, the customary institution exists within a setting in which state institutions and law play a role. These authors argue that *ur panchayats* originate in, and still function as, institutions of "self-governance," guarding over fisher wellbeing. They also point out, however, that these institutions have changed over time and display increasing geographical variation. In the case of the Lake Victoria, analyzed by Onyango (2018), the Beach Management Units (BMUs) are developed together with government but still enjoy a level of rule- and decision-making autonomy.

Legal conflicts may remain dormant, and pose a threat to an organization from both the inside and the outside. Though they have proven their utility for about 80 years now, the official mandate of the Norwegian cooperative sales organizations is still subject to strife from within the industry (Jentoft and Finstad 2018). Nevertheless, political support has remained strong enough to withstand pressure to dismantle it. Vigo, in Galicia, Spain, offers a contrast to the Norwegian experience. Due to the low prices paid by the Vigo processing companies, fishers at the beginning of the twentieth century carried out a series of strikes to demand minimum rates for the fish. However, instead of committing to the fishers' interests, government authorities established a mandatory auction system, which resulted in fishers losing the capacity to negotiate the price (Carmona Badía 1994; Alonso-Población 2014).

Small-scale fishing communities characteristically allocate different roles to men and women (Acheson 1981; Kleiber et al. 2015). Women are primarily involved in the processing, marketing, and distribution of fish, while in some cases also participating in the harvesting process. Weeratunge et al.

[5] https://www.rochdalepioneersmuseum.coop/about-us/the-rochdale-principles/

(2010: 405) argue that if gleaning and post-harvesting activities were taken into consideration in official statistics, "the fisheries and aquaculture sector might well turn out to be female sphere." Lack of such statistics make women invisible in the public eye. As a consequence, their contributions are not recognized and their rights remain insecure. However, in Brazil, the government has recently provided a legal recognition of the role of women in harvest and post-harvest fisheries activities (Kalikoski and Vasconcellos 2012; Fröcklin et al. 2013; Béné et al. 2015). Women there now receive unemployment benefits during fishing closures.

Themes of women's empowerment, collective action, and social entrepreneurship run through the SSF Guidelines from beginning to end. The SSF Guidelines refer to the need to create equitable gender relations, and suggest that women should play a bigger role in decision making at community level and beyond. At the same time, the SSF Guidelines hold that one must be sensitive to cultural differences and to the need to allow fishers and fish workers their own gender dynamic—which provides a brake on too eager efforts of social engineering (Bavinck 2006). The SSF Guidelines (paragraph 8.1) argue, however, that practices that are discriminatory against women should nevertheless be challenged.

Women often have limited access to decision-making positions in fisher organizations, like in the case with the *ur panchayats* in India, as described by Bavinck and Vivekanandan, (2017). Yet, McConney and Medeiros (2014) find that women's leadership is among the factors that often make collective action successful (also see Alonso-Población and Siar 2018, Onyango and Jentoft 2011). In Galicia, Spain, women shellfish gatherers were able to enhance their political influence within existing fisher organizations (*cofradías*), participate in co-management forums, and gain greater control over market returns (Meltzoff 1995; Frangoudes et al. 2008). Women's empowerment through participation in organizations is also an issue in Onyango's case of the Lake Victoria BMUs. Likewise, Solís Rivera and colleagues from Costa Rica (CoopeTárcoles) stress the importance of involving women in organization-building from the very beginning, before the table is set.

Conclusion

This paper proceeded in three stages. First, we considered poverty in small-scale fisheries from various perspectives: as an expression of absolute and relational qualities, a multi-dimensional concept, and related either to an occupation of last resort or a safety valve for people in need of nutrition and income. One argument was that the primary cause of poverty and marginalization of small-scale fisheries is not necessarily a paucity of natural resources (fish, land) and technology (fishing gear), but rather the lack of access rights to these resources as well as the exploitative economic and social relations they tie into. Consequently, getting fishers and fish workers out of poverty and into the mainstream of sustainable development calls for a re-structuring of social relationships, including rights (or granting of rights) and resources, and the implementation of social policies and strategies that facilitate the altering of power imbalances. Such remedies, we argue, require transformative policies and collective action, undertaken by small-scale fisheries actors, sometimes in collaboration with other parties. The support of civil society to this cause can make a significant difference, as can the backing of government, as is illustrated in several of the case studies of this thematic series. With the SSF Guidelines, which FAO Member States have committed themselves to implementing, small-scale fishers and fish workers have a new incentive to gather for the achievement of common goals.

Secondly, we examined the factors that affect the forming of small-scale fisheries organizations. We emphasized that small-scale fishers and fish workers generally belong to the less privileged and marginalized classes. In many instances, they are victims of exploitation and discrimination. Collective action is therefore an instrument of resistance and empowerment, which helps in redressing the structural conditions that lead to poverty. We also investigated situations where the causes and effects of poverty cannot easily be distinguished; a consequence can also in the next instance be a cause, and hence the idea of poverty as a vicious circle. Under such circumstances, collective action may be difficult to achieve: where should one begin, which actions takes precedence, what conditions are essential? Getting organized is always a means but often occurs in social, cultural, and political contexts that may or may not be conducive to its success. Forming networks and alliances within and between communities are frequently essential as an initial move. Organization-building has a "step zero" where things happen informally, through communication and awareness creation about potential avenues for lifting small-scale fisheries people out of poverty. It also builds capital to tap into at later stages, when collective actions assumes formality and routine through the workings of the new organization.

Few financial resources, poor organization skills, and a lack of time are substantial handicaps. For poor people, collective action does not come first on the time schedule. Family wellbeing comes first. Fragmented local communities, social conflict, and scattered locations are conditions that are normally not conducive to collective action. All these factors suggest that small-scale fisheries organizations may be in need of external support, especially in initial stages, when people may find themselves in situations that collective action theorists like Olson (1971), Ostrom (1990), and Hardin (1992) explain as Prisoner's Dilemma games. Then, an external agent, like a civil society or a government actor, can be instrumental, especially in an initial phase. The SSF Guidelines

assign them such a role. Building small-scale fisheries organizations is bound to be a learning process, because organizations will need to be adapted to their particular circumstances that are rarely stable. Outside support should not be forced upon them. The latter actually is a reason why such small-scale fisheries organizations have failed in in the past. As Kurien (1985) notes, there is an important difference between creating an organization *for* and *of* fishers. Organization can be an instrument of empowering poor and marginalized small-scale fishers and fish workers, but can also be a tool for elite control, as Robert Michels observed in his classic treatise (Michels 2001 [1911]).

Thirdly, the paper scrutinized the genesis and nature of small-scale fisheries organizations. Such organizations vary from pre-modern forms of self-governance and producer cooperatives formed according to classic design principles, to hybrid organizations, which combine elements from different organizational modes and historical epochs. Sometimes, organizations are limited to the local level; in other instances, they bridge localities and operate at national and regional levels. We then highlighted the varying conditions of legal pluralism, whereby customary organizations are sometimes part of the regular state-induced governance system, but in other instances belong to a separate legal order altogether. Legal pluralism is an empirical fact, which may both hinder and facilitate collective action and organization-building. Pre-modern institutions and organizations have a function in the modern age, as demonstrated in this thematic series. They often reflect deep-held values and normative principles about collective action that should not be overruled. However, their effectiveness as instruments for empowerment, poverty eradication, and equity should undergo critical examination. Our last topic was gender equity. Small-scale fisheries organizations do not always facilitate equal involvement of women, but may be encouraged to do so, as the SSF Guidelines do: mainstreaming of women's perspectives, roles, and interests in collective action for fisheries development should be the rule. After all, according to SOFIA (2016), women constitute half of the work force in world fisheries.

Poverty in small-scale fisheries is nested in the structures and dynamics of wider society. Therefore, the solutions to poverty eradication cannot be found within the fisheries sector alone. There is obviously a need for supportive infrastructure, like legal frameworks and macro-economic policies. Still, there are limits to how governable small-scale fisheries are from a distance and from the top-down. Rather, governance of small-scale fisheries should follow the "subsidiarity principle"; what can be governed locally, should also be governed there. What needs to be governed at higher levels, can still involve fisher and fish workers, for instance by building federations of local organizations. It should not be a goal in itself to bring small-scale fisheries under government control. There are arguments to be made for their self-governance. This is also conducive for innovations to emerge from below. Indeed, small-scale fishers and fish workers have a right to be free. This is also the line of reasoning of Amartya Sen (1999). One can hardly think about collective action for poverty eradication without such freedom. Collective action is also a prime instrument for enhancing such freedom, and for achieving higher levels of both individual and collective wellbeing.

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