



**Small Scale Fishers and Transformative Potential of Fisheries
Policies in Cambodia, India, and Sri Lanka**

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ABSTRACT

This article emanated from a research that dealt with a cross-country research project on Gender, migration and fisheries in Asia - Cambodia, India and Sri Lanka. The project aimed at providing a critical understanding of changes taken place among the fishing communities in these countries within the context of depleting natural resources, social conflicts, climate change, technological changes and policy changes. The main aim of this article is to review and discuss current policy initiatives in fisheries in Cambodia, India and Sri Lanka to examine their transformative potential in addressing the issues of poverty and well-being among fishing communities. Using content analysis method, this paper focuses on the 2010-2019 and 2015-2024 Strategic Planning Frameworks in Fisheries of Cambodia, 2017-fishery policy in India and 2018-fishery policy in Sri Lanka to understand their transformative potentials. The analysis finds that the selected policies show tremendous transformative potentials in the areas of reducing poverty and improving the well-being of SSFs. Yet their capacity to make such transformation remains unclear. It calls for a comprehensive policy approach to address the issues of small-scale fishers who are the backbone of the fisheries livelihoods.

1. Introduction

Small-scale fisheries in the coastal and inland aquatic ecosystems provide livelihoods, food security and nutrition for millions of people across the world. It contributes to more than half of the world's fish harvest and employ both men and women. Among the employed, more than 50% is said to be women who contribute particularly in the post-harvest fisheries (FAO 2019). Majority of the SSF are living in developing countries. Within the context of depleting marine resources, coastal land grabbing, policy changes, political changes, economic changes and social conflicts, well-being of SSF has come under threat. In most parts of the world, SSFs are identified as the most vulnerable and socially excluded groups (Béné et al., 2016; Derek, 2018; Salagrama, 2006; Weeratunge et al., 2014). The SSFs, are facing the impacts of past and ongoing socio economic, political, environmental, and technological changes that affect them negatively. However, they continue to grow despite several challenges they encounter. Their current situation of poverty and poor well-being reflects that the policies adopted in individual countries to tackle the issues had done little to address their problems.

In portraying the problems in the small-scale fisheries sector, the literature has extensively brought the environmental issues to the forefront of the discussions (Andriessse, 2018; Hanich, 2018; Sampantamit et al., 2020). However, on the other hand, literature also highlights that in order to ensure a healthy fish stock, it is important to focus on fishers- especially SSFs- too (Said, 2019; Bene et al., 2016; Britton and Coulthard, 2013). In the absence of adequate attention to SSFs, they might continue to put their pressures on fisheries resources. Recognizing this vacuum, the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), goal 14 has attempted to protect the rights of SSFs. The FAO, by introducing the voluntary Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines, assign a human rights dimension to small-scale fisheries, opening up the space for dialogue

among policy makers, academics, researchers and the fishing community (Bene et al., 2015; Said, 2019; Jentof and Chuenpagdee, 2019). Despite these international concerns, SSFs in many countries continue to experience poverty and lack of well-being.

Fishing communities in Cambodia, India and Sri Lanka (herein referred as study countries) are also witnessing significant shifts in their fisheries-based livelihoods due to changes taking place in economic, social, political, environmental, and technological spheres (Lund et al., 2020). These shifts are marked by a complex set of policy environments too. To ensure the well-being of the SSFs and alleviate/reduce their poverty, good policy measures are critical. Although the governments in the study countries have taken policy measures to address the issues of SSFs, the transformative potentials of such measures in the long run need scrutiny. It is important to enhance such policies to make visible impacts on the lives of SSFs that ensure a transformative change at the interface of increasing discussion on blue economy.

In the fisheries literature, although considerable number of works highlights the marginalization, vulnerability and poverty of SSFs (Lund, 2020; Bavinck, 2014; Béné et al., 2016; Derek, 2018; Salagrama, 2006), research on transformative potentials of fisheries policies in addressing poverty and well-being, with a focus on SSF have been lacking. Filling this research gap, the purpose of this article is to analyze the current policies that directly deal with fisheries in India and Sri Lanka and Strategic Planning Frameworks of Fisheries in Cambodia -which directly deal with fisheries- to examine their transformative potential in addressing the issues of poverty and well-being among SSFs. The major research question that this article attempts to address is whether and to what extent the existing fisheries policies in the selected countries address the issues of poverty and well-being in fishing

communities. It is pertinent to note that, this article does not focus on any measurable outcomes of policies, but question and engage in a discussion on understanding the transformative potentials of existing main policy documents that deal directly with fisheries, in all three countries. In doing so, it highlights key objectives, strategies and plans identified in the policies that signal transformative potentials, or do not show any/ limited transformative potentials. Hence, this article calls for an exhaustive analysis of all interconnected policies, laws and regulations related to fisheries in all three countries for a comprehensive understanding of transformative potentials of such mechanisms in addressing the problems faced by SSFs.

Within the above contextual background, this article begins with a description of fisheries sector in the study countries. Then it discusses, what transformative policies are, and how the fisheries policies of the study countries have incorporated relevant dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Then it elaborates on the method. The next section moves to the discussion on the main findings of the analysis. Finally, it concludes with a discussion of the relevance and the importance of transformative policies for poverty reduction and well-being improvement among SSFs.

1.1 Fisheries sector in Study Countries

1.1.1 Cambodia

In Cambodia fish and rice have traditionally been important components of food security. Hence, agriculture and fisheries play an important role in the Cambodian economy, in which a large number of people depend on common pool resource-based forestry and fishery livelihood activities. According to the National Institute of Statistics (2020), nearly 35% of Cambodia's population draws their livelihood from fish cultivation and fisheries

related activities. In Cambodia, inland fisheries are more prevalent than coastal fisheries. Livelihoods related to inland fisheries depend on the Mekong River, the Tonle Sap River (including its tributaries) and the Tonle Sap Lake. Households who engage in inland fishing tend to live near the Tonle Sap Lake (44%). Fisheries management in Cambodia is divided between central and local governments. The Department of Fisheries of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) is in charge of developing research and drafting laws and policies on fisheries (and aquaculture) at the central level. At the local level, fisheries are managed by the Provincial-Urban Fishery Authorities, who have the necessary powers to ensure compliance with the law in this area. The policy framework guiding Cambodia's fisheries is defined by inter linked and integrated laws, rules, regulations and policies. The existing main policy document related to fisheries in Cambodia is the Strategic Planning Framework (SPF) of 2010-2019 and 2015-2024.

1.1.2 India

India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) includes 2.02 million km² and a coastline of 8,118 km. In addition, rivers, ponds, canals, reservoirs and tanks also contribute to the Indian fisheries sector. Indian fisheries, which can be categorized as coastal, inland or aquaculture, employ over 14 million people directly and many more indirectly. The sector provides not only food and nutrients, but also livelihoods for a large number of poor people (Salagrama, 2006). Transformations in the Indian fisheries sector since independence have changed the sector from one that was previously traditional to one that is increasingly modern and commercial. In particular, mechanized multiday boats, modern nets, freezer facilities and loans for fishers have resulted in increasing overcapitalization and commercialization. The modernization of fisheries has created tension among traditional fishers, who find it

increasingly difficult to compete with modern fishers. Fishing now requires more skills and, especially, technical knowledge.

The institutional context in which Indian fisheries operate includes government bodies and regulations at the national and state levels. At the national level, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare is the highest authority, responsible for policies, rules, regulations and laws related to fisheries. Under this ministry, the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries takes responsibility for fisheries (Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, 2017). Other institutions related to fisheries under the ministry include the National Fisheries Development Board and the State Departments of Fisheries. In addition, several fisheries-related research, training, trade and community institutions exist at the national and state levels with the aim of increasing the potential of the fisheries sector to contribute to food security, poverty alleviation, export market growth, tourism and livelihood creation in the Indian economy.

1.1.3 Sri Lanka

With an EEZ of 517,000 km², Sri Lanka has a fisheries sector that plays an important role in providing employment and nutrition for its people. Currently 2.7 million Sri Lankan people depend on fisheries, both directly and indirectly, for their livelihoods (MFARD, 2016). Sri Lanka's fisheries sector is divided into marine, inland and aquaculture fisheries. However, it continues to be dominated by marine fisheries (though rapid developments are occurring in inland and aquaculture fisheries). The marine fisheries sector is classified into two main sectors: coastal and offshore/deep-sea fisheries. The inland and aquaculture sector is divided into three subsectors: inland capture fisheries, aquaculture fisheries and shrimp farms (MFARD, 2016). With the exception of a few large-scale fishing companies, the majority of fishing activities are small-scale.

In Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Development (MFARD) is the central state body governing the fisheries sector. Under the MFARD, several other institutions facilitate fisheries governance to achieve aims and objectives related to the provision and maintenance of infrastructure, the purchase and sale of fisheries products, the management and conservation of coastal and inland fisheries resources, the development of aquaculture and R&D in fisheries (MFARD, 2017). The following institutions were established under different fisheries-related acts and laws: the Ceylon 26 Fisheries Harbour Corporation (CFHC; 1962), the Ceylon Fisheries Corporation (CFC; 1964), the National Aquatic Resources Resource and Development Agency (NARA; 1982), the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DFAR, 1996), the National Aquatic Development Authority (NAQDA, 1999) and the Cey-Nor Foundation Limited (CNFL, 2007). Apart from these institutions, provincial councils and other local government institutions also play facilitating roles in fisheries, though without legal authority. The Sri Lanka Forum for Small Scale Fisheries (SLFSSF), was established in 2018, to ensure the rights of SSFs, aligning with the FAO's voluntary guidelines for securing small Scale fisheries.

1.2 Transformative policies and SDGs

This article uses the UNRISD (2016) conceptualization of transformative change to reflect on transformative policies. UNRISD (2016), from a sustainable development perspective, defines transformative change as changes targeted at bringing qualitative changes in economy, society and environment. It defines transformative change in relation to the economy as 'changes in economic structures to promote employment-intensive growth patterns that ensure macroeconomic stability and policy space' (UNRISD, 2016: 3). In terms of the environment, it emphasizes that economic changes should be environmentally

sustainable, with changes in production and consumption managed by legislation, regulation and public policy. UNRISD (2016) notes that change is also needed in social structures and relations, influenced by the growing economic power of elites and differences based on class, gender, ethnicity, religion, and location, which constrain peoples' choices and agency. Thus, it is important that transformative change addresses norms and institutions that shape behavior and the organization of social, economic, environmental, and political spheres in the long run. Such change requires both individual and collective action.

Adding to these dimensions, UNRISD suggests that policies aiming to bring about transformative change should not undermine existing systems, strategies and institutions (UNRISD 2016). Thus, transformative policies should not neglect the context in which they operate, but must understand existing social, economic, institutional, and legal aspects. This brings to light another integral aspect of transformative change. Thus, transformative change also requires different sectors to work collaboratively towards a common objective. Hence, policy coherency complementarity and coordination become an essential characteristic of transformative change. UNRISD's definition of transformative policies are closely connected to the Sustainable Development Agenda of the UN. Hence, it is important to look at how SDGs are connected to existing fisheries policies in the study countries.

At the global level, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has also recognized the importance of ocean resources, through its goal 14. One of the targets related to goal 14 focus on small-scale fishers and their access to marine resources and markets. This goal also accepts the role of marine resources in poverty reduction and well-being of fishing communities, reflecting the future policy intervention governments could make positively towards achieving the goals of SDG

while addressing the issues of poverty and well-being of the fishing community (Diz, Morgera, & Wilson, 2017). The governments of countries under study have attempted to align their fisheries policies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Achieving SDG 14 demands a very broad and a holistic approach which should include economic, community, political and environmental dimensions. The Goal 14 of SDG commits to the protection of life below water.

Cambodia, India and Sri Lanka have adopted different work plans to align their fisheries policies with SDGs. SDG 14 points out the need to "conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development," with respect to reducing poverty, increasing food security and supporting traditional livelihoods. In Cambodia, SPFs for Fisheries explicitly integrates SDGs in its strategies. The SPF 's (2015-2024) strategic approach is directly linked with SDGs in the areas of livelihoods, conservation and management related to fisheries. The guiding development principles of the SPF (2015-2024) clearly spell out viability and sustainability of eco system, needs, aspirations and responsibilities of communities and individuals, and improving education, which are some important components of SDGs. In the case of India, the overarching goal of the NPMF is, the sustainable use of marine living resources within its EEZ. Its mission states: "While keeping sustainability of the resources at the core of all actions, the policy framework will meet the national, social and economic goals, livelihood sustainability and socio-economic upliftment of the fisher community, and is intended to guide the coordination and management of marine fisheries in the country during the next ten years" (Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, 2017, p. 14). This mission is in line with the SDG 2030 agenda. India's fishery policy identifies seven pillars as strategies through which it aims to achieve policy goals. They are sustainable

development, socio economic upliftment of fishers, principle of subsidiarity, partnership inter-generational equity, gender justice and precautionary approach. The policy vision, while emphasizing the importance of sustainability, mentions that the policy framework will meet the national socio economic goals, livelihood sustainability and socio economic upliftment of the fishing community and involve in fisheries governance during the upcoming decade.

Sri Lanka has also made attempts to incorporate SDGs in its fishery policy. In terms of acknowledging global concerns, the policy incorporates some SDGs, such as the eradication of poverty (Goal 1), gender equality (Goal 5), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) and life below water (Goal 14). Study countries have also paid attention to the voluntary guidelines for securing small Scale fisheries introduced by the FAO to various extents. The FAO guidelines recognizes the role of SSFs in the

fisheries value chain, food security, poverty eradication, equal development and sustainable resource utilization.

2. Materials and Methods

The academic literature on policy analysis highlights common approaches to the process whilst also emphasizing flexibility. Policy analysis takes different forms and has been identified by some as complex (Bardach & Patashnik, 2015; Dunn, 2015). In order to identify the research gaps and focus of published works, a literature review was conducted. After determining the types of documents that would be needed, documents were identified and retrieved from official government websites, and directly obtained from collaborative researchers, where internet access was not possible. After all of the policy documents were collected, they were reviewed to get an overall understanding. Table 1 shows the policies of each country that were included for analysis.

Table 1. Analyzed Documents

Policies	Cambodia	India	Sri Lanka
Fisheries	The Strategic Planning Framework for Fisheries (2010–2019 and its update 2015-2024)	National Policy on Marine Fisheries (NPMF) (2017)	The National Fisheries and Aquatic Policy (2018)

After policy documents were identified for all of the study countries, each document was analyzed to determine its objectives, vision, mission, strategies, and plans. The content analysis method applied was very useful to get an overall picture of the selected policy documents. Next, all documents were further analyzed to determine whether they addressed issues of poverty and well-being in fishing communities. Following on, the documents that addressed these issues were

critically analyzed to determine whether they were adequately transformative in reducing poverty and improving well-being in fishing communities, with a focus on economic, environmental and social dimensions and institutions and norms. The results of the analysis are thematically discussed under selected dimensions, based on the objective of this paper.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Mapping Transformative Potentials

This section focuses on the transformative potentials of the policies analyzed, on the basis of the identified themes, namely economic, environmental and social

dimensions and changes in norms and institutions.

3.2 Economy, Environment and Social Dimensions

The below table 2 summarizes the analysis of policy documents according to themes related to transformative changes.

Table 2. Economy, environment, and social dimensions in fishery policies

Dimensions of transformative changes		Cambodia	India	Sri Lanka
Economy environment and social dimensions	Economy	Targets: Reducing poverty and improve well-being among fishing communities (fishers, fish processes, women): Focuses on different dimensions of poverty; increase export-oriented production through support from the private sector; develop aquaculture	Promoting alternative livelihoods; setting up mariculture farms and parks; compensation during fishing ban season; subsidies for fishing supplies; women friendly financial schemes; building transport for marketing; empowerment of SSFs	Fish harvest in deep sea and un-exploited areas; exploiting aquaculture and inland fisheries; market driven export-oriented production; improving fisheries infrastructure;
	Environment	Strengthening institutional mechanisms to protect the area; Focus on nature conservation; strict regulations on fishing areas	Under fisheries management: controlling marine environment and pollution, climate change adaption, strengthening and establishing Marine protected areas; extension of fishing ban season	Focuses on sustainable management of resources; stronger governance; participation in compliance with and cooperation with international agreements; and attention paid to aspects of the environment, climate and natural disasters; involving fishing communities in designing, planning and implementing fisheries management measures

	Society	Facilitating community intervention: Mainstreaming gender; limiting child labour and youth's participation;	Plans to continue welfare measures and strengthen fisher community safety nets through direct benefit transfer schemes that include community welfare, housing and other amenities: Gender equity.	Improving social safety, security, tenure rights and human resource development in the areas of health, education and digital technology, as well as the focus on the right to an adequate standard of living; capacity building programmes; measures to prevent alcoholism; compensating development victims; respecting the tenure right to land, water and fish resources for traditional, migrant, subsistence and artisanal fishing communities; inclusion in the areas of digital technology, education and health; ensuring human rights
Norms and Institutions		Sustainable management and conservation of fisheries resources for food security and economic development; It calls for collaborative work with government, the private sector, fishing communities, community councils, donors, and NGOs.	Advocates the strengthening of fisheries cooperatives and forming women cooperatives; Increase the space for active participation and collective action that could change social norms.	Recognises fisheries cooperatives, empowering them and strengthening their ability to address issues relating to fisheries and fisher well-being; Represent fishing communities at decision-making platforms.

(Source: Classification based on policy documents reviewed)

3.2.1 Cambodia

The analysis revealed that among the study countries, Cambodia's SPFs have a comprehensive focus on fisheries management, aquaculture development, management, and processing, and the livelihoods of the local community. In order to achieve the aims, the SPFs list certain

targets that, if achieved, could significantly reduce poverty and improve well-being in fishing communities. Specifically, the targets relate to reducing poverty among small-scale fishers and fish processors, increasing women's livelihoods in fisheries and subsectors, improving employment opportunities in fisheries, and facilitating community interventions, attempts to

address the issues of poverty and lack of well-being. The targets are supported by clearly defined plans and programmes that could lead to transformative changes. While attending to the conservation and management dimensions of fisheries, it also pays attention to social and economic dimensions. The SPF for Fisheries (2010–2019), in its strategic approach, identifies three pillars that clearly reflect the government's approach to fisheries development: 1) fisheries: inland and marine; 2) aquaculture: inland and marine; and 3) post-harvest and trade. These pillars are identified as instrumental for supporting food security, poverty alleviation and economic growth, which are essential social and economic dimensions of a transformative policy, beyond the environmental dimension. The SPF for Fisheries (2010–2019) could be identified as a milestone in Cambodian fisheries policies.

In order to ensure equitable development, the SPFs place special emphasis on poor and disadvantaged groups, addressing different dimensions of poverty and well-being and showing transformative potential. While attending to the conservation and management dimensions of fisheries, they also pay attention to social and economic dimensions.

The first aim of SPF (2015-2024) is to develop capture fisheries and management through improved management, enhanced governance, habitat conservation, more resilient livelihoods, enhanced rights and adaptive planning; these measures are expected to enhance the livelihoods of fishing communities. While acknowledging the importance of ecological concerns, the strategies do not undermine the role of social and economic aspects in enhancing the livelihoods of fishing communities; hence, they show potential for transformative change. At the outset of the document (SPF 2015-2024), a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis identifies potential threats and opportunities in

fisheries. The analysis of the SPFs brings to light the entanglement of economic, environmental and social dimensions, and suggests that specific strategies should be found to address the identified weaknesses and threats (Fisheries Administration 2010: 4). For example, SPF (2015-2024) holds that, due to the open nature of fish resources, many poor people treat work in fisheries as a fall back, which could eventually lead to severe exploitation, due to the seasonal variability of fish resources. However, the SWOT analysis also suggests that the sector could bring growth in earnings and production. In order to achieve this growth, good management and institutions will be required.

3.2.2 India

India's National Policy on Marine Fisheries (NPMF) (2017), which replaced the Comprehensive Marine Policy (2004), includes objectives and strategies that could potentially reduce poverty, and improve the well-being of fishing communities. The overall strategy involves important dimensions such as sustainable development, the socio-economic well-being of fishers, the principle of subsidiarity, partnership, intergenerational equity, gender justice, and a precautionary approach. The policy was introduced to strengthen the fisheries sector, with particular emphasis on the sustainable use of fisheries resources for the benefit of current and future generations. It also focuses on the FAO Small Scale Fisheries (SSF) Voluntary guidelines, taking a rights-based approach to ensure food security, poverty eradication and the empowerment of small-scale fishers. The policy outlines the various strategies recommended by the legislation to address poverty and the well-being of fishing communities. While some of these strategies directly relate to fishing communities, the majority take a broader approach, targeting both small-scale and large-scale fisheries. It is very important to understand that the priorities of large-scale and small-scale

fisheries are different in relation to poverty and well-being.

Under the heading of 'Mariculture', strategy 27 identifies the importance of making space for local communities to participate in setting mariculture farms and parks (NPMF 2017). In terms of economic changes, the NPMF (2017) accepts mariculture's role in increasing production. The policy claims that the government will support the sector by providing assistance in forming mariculture farms, catering for institutional and commercial needs and developing local markets and value chains. The document further notes that the government will also motivate local fishers and entrepreneurs by building capacity for mariculture. In addition, the policy notes that the government will also promote local fishing communities, fisher groups, fisheries cooperatives and government organizations to develop mariculture.

Although this initiative could create new employment opportunities and increase production – essential components of transformative change that could result in intensive employment growth – it could also severely affect the already eroded livelihoods of small-scale fishers, who have become victims of the modernization of fisheries. Mariculture requires large capital investment, technical know-how and a good understanding of global markets. In the end, mariculture – through environmental degradation, could result in reduced harvests, food insecurity, and less well-being in fishing communities. As competing interests for coastal areas intensify, an additional challenge to implementing mariculture-based fisheries is created. Hence, there are grounds to question mariculture's role in reducing poverty and improving well-being.

NPMF (2017) pays due attention to the environmental consideration of fisheries resources through its various conservation strategies. The strategies discussed for fisheries management (6–18), the marine

environment and pollution (37–40) and climate change adaptation (41) endorse its commitments in this respect (Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying 2017). The policy document also makes provisions to evaluate and review existing legislation related to Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), in order to ensure that the livelihoods of traditional fishers are not affected. This pursuit shows the attention paid to the livelihoods of poor fishers and the potential transformation it could make in reducing poverty and ensuring the well-being of fishing communities. In NPMF (2017), strategies 42–47, which fall under the heading of 'Fisher welfare, social security nets and institutional credits,' directly address issues related to the poverty and well-being of fishing communities from a social dimension perspective (Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, 2017). These strategies include: the continuation of existing welfare measures: the provision of housing and other amenities, compensation for natural disaster-related losses, a proposed extension of the fish ban season, increased compensation to conserve fisheries resources, strengthened fisheries cooperatives in relation to harvest and post-harvest functions, skills development, a scientific approach to climate change issues, subsidization of fishing supplies, and the provision of technical training for artisanal fishers looking to move into the more economically viable fisheries sector. Again, these strategies depend heavily on welfare measures and require a large budget for implementation. For this reason, they put a heavy strain on the state. Thus, the suggested strategies, rather than bringing about transformative change, could actually perpetuate poverty and reduce well-being in fishing communities.

The NPMF (2017) identifies gender as a strategic area of intervention. It widely recognizes: the role of women in fisheries-related activities and livelihoods, and proposes (in strategy 48) to build fisheries cooperatives, create women friendly financial

schemes, promote a safe working environment for women, build transport facilities for marketing, encourage women's participation in small-scale fishing, develop value added activities for women and support women's participation in fisheries management (Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, 2017). This strategic focus on gender is expected to transform the social, economic and environmental aspects of women's relationship with fisheries, as women have continuously been identified as victims of gendered ideologies and India's neoliberal approach to fisheries development (Hapke, 2001). In India, women in fishing communities are largely involved in fish trading, while a small number is involved in fish auctioning. Women fish traders and auctioneers face a number of problems in storing their fish that lead to post-harvest loss or force them to sell their fish at very low prices. Therefore, strategy 48 could promote transformative change in fisheries in the identified areas, as most of these areas are important for women fish vendors.

3.2.3 Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's fisheries policy of 2018 has nine objectives related to the economy, the environment and society (Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development (MFARD, 2018). Surprisingly, six of these objectives aim at bringing about economic changes while only two speak about environmental and social dimensions. The policy's thematic areas are: marine fisheries, aquaculture and inland fisheries, consumers and markets, and the blue economy and other areas. In terms of priority areas, the policy's focus on marine fisheries shows the importance of environmental, political and economic dimensions. The economic dimensions focus mainly on increasing fish production in deep-sea and other unexploited areas. They also aim at expanding and exploiting aquaculture and inland fisheries to increase fish production.

The attention paid to the development of deep-sea, aquaculture and inland fisheries could lead to more employment opportunities in the sector, which would signal a good economic transformation. The policy also suggests various measures to regulate the sector, including stronger governance in the areas of planning, development and management, which could create more efficient management of fisheries resources. Until recently, Sri Lanka had not explored the potentials of inland fisheries, even though such fisheries were important for livelihoods in the dry zone. Therefore, the government's vision to develop inland fisheries and aquaculture will likely attract more people from non-fishing communities to the sector. While the strategies to improve inland fisheries and aquaculture could reduce poverty and improve the well-being of fishing communities, they could also intensify competition and conflict. Therefore, the feasibility and sustainability of the policy raises questions about its transformative potential to address poverty and well-being in poor fishing households.

The 2018 fisheries policy aims at extensively promoting markets through increased exports. The strategies outlined in the policy advocate for a market-driven production approach to fisheries and aquaculture products. However, such strategies might not help to eradicate the poverty or fulfil the well-being aspirations of poor fishing communities as they have limited access to big competitive markets. With the aim of prioritising products for international export markets, the Sri Lankan government has already commenced and invested in significant fisheries infrastructure development projects, such as fishing harbours and storage and freezing facilities. Although these infrastructure development measures could lead to greater investment in fisheries, they may also strengthen the division between the state supported modern industrialised fisheries sector and the

traditional fishing sector, leaving the latter to live on their own.

The policy, under the theme of 'Other areas,' identifies important dimensions needed for transformative change. While the sections discussed under this topic are not logically connected, one could group the various strategies into economic, environmental and social categories. In terms of the economic strategies, employment generation is identified as paramount. Other economic objectives include: greater employment creation within the sector; support for women, and especially widows, in performing microbusiness activities; the development of training and capacity building programmes to assist women and marginalised groups in taking up supplementary income earning activities; community involvement in integrated sustainable tourism; greater engagement in aquaculture and aquaculture-related fisheries in adjoining wetland areas; youth training programmes in advanced technology related to fisheries, aquaculture and new marine industries targeting employment, training school dropouts and crew members for foreign employment; and continued implementation of poverty alleviation programmes for sustainable livelihoods. Some of these objectives, such as community involvement in integrated sustainable tourism and training of youths and widows, demonstrate how the latest policy identifies vulnerable groups in fisheries and tries to address their issues. The above identified areas are very promising for effecting not only economic transformation, but also social transformation. Such transformations could potentially make positive impacts on the poverty reduction and well-being expectations of various groups among poor fishing communities.

The policy also draws on the blue economy concept. Although the blue economy entered public discourse long before the policy was enacted (MFARD, 2018), the policy does not detail any strategies to accommodate the

concept. Nonetheless, the policy's areas of focus skew towards obtaining economic benefits from the sea. It is too early to estimate the economic transformative potential of the blue economy to address the poverty and well-being of poor fishing households. The attention paid to the environmental dimension of the latest fisheries policy is spelled out in all policy priority areas except in that referring to consumers and the market. Ensuring the sustainable management and conservation of fisheries resources, both on land and at sea, is prioritised through strategies such as the following: sustainable management of resources; stronger governance; participation in compliance with and cooperation with international agreements; and attention paid to aspects of the environment, climate and natural disasters. The details of the action areas show the government's commitment to ensuring environmental sustainability in the fisheries sector and, hence, transformative potential.

In the policy, strategies related to the social dimensions of transformative change seek to improve the socio-economic conditions of the fisher community, promote gender equality, affirm human rights, and improve the organisation of fishers. Areas of interventions identified as strategies include broad areas of concern and signal broader areas that could lead to transformative socio-economic changes. For instance, the attention paid to gender in the latest fisheries policy carries the potential to create transformative change in the social sphere. The policy proposes that the government will take measures to: promote equal opportunities for women's participation in fisheries activities, make gender mainstreaming an integral part of small-scale fisheries development strategies, create conditions for both men and women to have equal access to resources and benefits and encourage both men and women to participate jointly in finding solutions to their problems.

According to the fisheries policy, areas in which the government is attempting to intervene that are explicitly related to poverty and well-being fall under the heading of 'Improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the fisher community.' In this section, proposed strategies include the following: preventing alcohol use; compensating development victims; improving social safety nets and social security for fish workers and fishers (including women); respecting the tenure right to land, water and fish resources for traditional, migrant, subsistence and artisanal fishing communities; making rights holders responsible for the sustainable use of resources; ensuring safe working conditions; involving fishing communities in designing, planning and implementing fisheries management measures; building capacity for effective participation in these areas; promoting human resource development in the areas of health, education and digital inclusion; and ensuring adequate standards of living in accordance with national and international human rights standards. The proposed areas of intervention cover all three dimensions required for transformative change.

As alcoholism is a major issue in the Sri Lankan fisheries sector, addressing this issue could result in socio-economic benefits for dependent members of poor fishing communities, as it could save them money and reduce social issues. Another important focus relates to the victims of development. Since the end of the war in 2009, coastal areas have become new spaces of development for modern export-oriented fishery, tourism, industry, ports, infrastructure, and reclamation projects. All these development activities have invariably affected coastal communities, in which the majority work as fishers. Due to these development interventions, access to fishing grounds is declining, forcing fishers to move away from fishing-based livelihoods. Although the coastal communities and other activists do not welcome these development projects, the

attention paid to the development victims shows that the government plays a significant role in protecting them from victimisation. The attention paid to social safety nets, tenure rights, sustainable resource use, work safety, participation in management, capacity building, human resource development, and adequate standards of living, shows the potential benefits to fishing communities of the proposed strategies, if they are implemented with good plans and projects.

Another dimension of the latest fisheries policy that could bring about transformative change is its focus on subsidies. In addition to proclaiming the above-mentioned priorities, the government plans to limit subsidies in the fisheries sector mainly to management and to thereby reduce dependence on subsidies. While this could be considered a good initiative, the declining opportunities in fisheries may mean that poor fishing households become more vulnerable. In the absence of a good alternative, the elimination of subsidies could worsen the poverty levels of fishing communities and drastically affect their well-being. Hence, rather than subsidy elimination, systematic planning and better organisation of subsidies for poor fishing households may improve their well-being.

The fisheries policy of 2018 pays considerable attention to the socio-economic conditions of fishing communities in its strategies, programmes and projects. However, these strategies and plans show different strengths and weaknesses. Relative to the previous policy, the current policy focuses more directly on improving the socio-economic conditions of poor fishing households, and the policy's suggested strategies have the potential to transform the poverty and well-being of fishing communities.

3.3 Changes in norms and institutions

In all of the study countries, collective initiatives play important roles for fisheries. However, such initiatives mainly focus on

fisheries management and the conservation of fisheries resources, which largely depend on cooperation between different actors. Increased community participation in management could lead to better governance at the local level, as it could create and strengthen spaces for participation. When spaces for community participation are open, communities become well aware of the resources they have and the need to manage, conserve and develop those resources to alleviate poverty and improve well-being in their communities.

3.3.1 Cambodia

The SPFs also call for a collaborative approach to achieving the policy vision of the sustainable management and conservation of fisheries resources for food security and socio-economic development. It identifies the government, the private sector, fishing communities, community councils, donors, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as collaborators that should work together towards this aim. It also emphasises the decisive role of women in fisheries management. It continues to stress the importance of Community Fisheries (CFIs), the Fisheries Administration (FiA) and NGOs in enhancing and strengthening fisheries management. The collective initiatives suggested in the areas of fisheries management, gender and child labour show the potential of the policy to change social norms and institutions.

3.3.2 India

The fisheries policies of India also suggest collective initiatives aimed at changing norms and institutions. In Indian fishing communities, fishing cooperatives play a significant role in many activities, ranging from managing to marketing. For this reason, they are a good example of successful collective initiatives within fishing communities. Strategies 42–48 of India's NPMF (2017) advocate the strengthening fisheries cooperatives and forming women

cooperatives, both of which could increase the space for active participation and collective action that could change social norms. Such initiatives could also mobilise women to identify and build on their existing knowledge of the fish trade (avoiding intermediaries) and fisheries resource management and form financial and social organisations that could challenge existing norms related to women in fisheries. Further, women's cooperatives could also serve as safe and comfortable spaces for their participation, and thus serve as good institutions.

3.3.3 Sri Lanka

The fisheries policy of 2018 Sri Lanka recognises fisheries cooperatives, empowering them and strengthening their ability to address issues related to fisheries and fisher well-being, and to represent fishing communities at decision-making platforms. The government also seeks to liaise with fisheries cooperatives in integrated coastal zone management. The productive role of fisheries cooperatives in managing fisheries, building resilience and implementing the SSF guidelines has been well documented. (Amarasinghe and Bavinck 2011, 2017). The focus on strengthening fisheries cooperatives can be identified as a collective strategy aimed at changing social norms and institutions.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Analysis of the existing fisheries policies of the study countries shows that they are influenced by national development agendas, the global development agenda (SDGs) and global ocean governance (the blue economy). They are also influenced by the SSF guidelines, which were largely developed by the FAO. These international concerns show that the fisheries sector is becoming increasingly connected with other sectors, and this interconnectedness is creating a kind of dependency wherein different sectors must work hand in hand to attain common

objectives. Raising the profile of the poverty and well-being of the fishing community in policy making within the context of international discussions and acknowledging fishing as not simply a livelihood but also a way of life, has many challenges due to competing interests.

The analysis of whether existing policies pertaining to the fisheries sector are adequately transformative in reducing poverty, improving well-being and facilitating adaptive strategies in fishing communities in the study countries has shown that the policies address these issues to varying degrees. The policies invariably recognise the important economic contribution of fisheries to national economies and seek to improve the living conditions of fishers. They also identify emerging threats to the sector at a large scale and propose measures and plans to overcome these threats to fishing communities (as defined differently in the various policy documents), despite their varying ability to bring about true transformative change.

Cambodia's SPFs for fisheries reflect continuity, clear targets and a comprehensive understanding of strengths and weaknesses; they also fully incorporate economic, environmental and social dimensions, which are necessary for transformative change. Furthermore, these dimensions are addressed in a closely connected way to ensure that development in one dimension does not compromise development in others. The SPF (2015-2024) has charted out strategic and programmatic approaches to develop the fisheries sector with a clear vision. However, one should be cautious when assessing the success of Cambodia's policies related to fisheries. As pointed out earlier in this article, when it comes to fisheries management, livelihoods and declining fish stocks document both success and failure. The reality could lie somewhere in between these two extremes. Hence, the policy's potential to bring about true

transformative change could also be located between these two extremes.

The fisheries policies of India and Sri Lanka also aim at bringing about changes in economic, environmental and social spheres of fishing communities. However, their transformative potential to reduce poverty and improve well-being remains unclear as they do not focus on a visible outcome that they expect to achieve within a timeframe. For example, strategies to achieve policy targets need to be clearly defined with a timeframe. First, while the policies in both countries accept that transformative change requires development in three important dimensions, they do not address these dimensions in a unified way. Although they consider SDG goal 14, they fail to recognize the interconnected nature of SDGs. Next, a closer look at the fisheries policies of India and Sri Lanka shows that they are trying to achieve socio-economic development in fishing communities within an open neoliberal agenda. This agenda buttresses the policies in many areas and supports the agenda to conserve, manage and protect fisheries resources. However, the policies are very unclear on their strategies to alleviate poverty and improve well-being whilst also responding to environmental challenges and capturing economic benefits. Further, some of the policies' strategies to enhance the livelihoods of fishing communities do not show any potential for transformation.

In terms of collective initiatives, the Cambodia focuses heavily on the conservation and management of fisheries resources through community participation. Opening the participation space for different stakeholders would provide opportunities to understand emerging needs and priorities and to re-orient policies to improve the lives of fishers. The creation of such spaces could also facilitate shared visions and coherent strategies and help institutions understand and reinforce the links between sectors. By incorporating gender into fisheries sector policies and strengthening existing

cooperatives, governments are aiming at bringing about changes in norms and institutions over the long term. Nonetheless, such long-term initiatives are still essential for transformative change.

All of the analyzed policy documents have a vision, and incorporate various strategies, policies and plans to change the economic, environmental and social spheres of fishing communities in their respective countries, with the larger goal of alleviating poverty and enhancing well-being in these communities. However, the analysis of policy visions, missions, objectives, strategies, and proposed programmes and/or projects shows that the adopted mechanisms for transformation do not always show the potential for positive transformation that could lead to equality, sustainability and empowerment. While some of the policies show significant potential for positive transformation, others show a potential for negative transformation or unforeseen results, as they are new and have not yet spelled out their strategies and implementation programmes. This study concludes that policies pertaining to the fisheries in all of the study countries enhance the fisheries sector. However, a unified approach is needed to make visible positive impacts on poverty and well-being of the SSF. The COVID19 pandemic has already started to affect millions of fishers across the study countries, especially in India and Sri Lanka. Hence, the post COVID 19 context could put extra pressure on governments in their attempt to support the SSFs and find the ways and means to navigate these global flagship initiatives.

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