

Development and Fisheries: SEAFDEC Role and Future Direction of International Collaborative Activities

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ABSTRACT

The Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) is an autonomous inter-governmental body established as a regional treaty organization on December 28, 1967, in accordance with an agreement concluded at the Second Ministerial Conference for Economic Development of Southeast Asia held in Manila, the Philippines in April 1967, to develop the fisheries potential of the region by rational utilization of the resources for providing food security to the people through the transfer of new technologies, research and information dissemination activities. While SEAFDEC has been deeply involved in technical cooperation with member countries for fisheries development in the region since its establishment in 1967, it seems that the roles required of SEAFDEC by its member countries has changed. This is unsurprising, as the SEAFDEC membership now covers all ASEAN countries and Japan.

SEAFDEC has put priority on fisheries development activities and related areas since 1967 as its major role, including the provision of a platform for South-South cooperation among member countries. However, recently, recognizing the importance of conservation and management of fisheries resources and environmental considerations in fisheries development throughout the region, SEAFDEC begins reviewing its policy to appropriately address the changes in the environment surrounding fisheries in the region, including cooperation not only within member countries but also with various relevant international organizations. Through various attempts to meet the requirements requested by the SEAFDEC regional policy in 1998 and the Plans of Action adopted at the ASEAN/SEAFDEC Millennium Conference in 2001, SEAFDEC has considered "Sustainability" a key word for the fisheries activities in the region and has implemented various prioritized programs focusing on sustainable fisheries in accordance with its guidelines for the "Plans of Action." The range of research related to SEAFDEC competence is quite wide, covering fishing technology, marine engineering, aquaculture technology, resource population dynamics, biology, food safety, and post-harvest technology. For these research subjects, SEAFDEC can take advantage of its very unique organizational structure covering the four main sub-sectors of fisheries. It also provides an open laboratory function to implement research programs in the region.

SEAFDEC understands that regional cooperation in fisheries-related research and technology transfer have become more important in light of international needs to achieve sustainability. The function of SEAFDEC could thus be more appropriate for other international organizations and associations to promote collaboration within Southeast Asia.

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† Some parts of this paper are based upon personal capacity working as the deputy secretary general, not on an officially agreed opinion of SEAFDEC.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT CENTER

The Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, SEAFDEC, is an autonomous intergovernmental organization established in 1967 in accordance with an agreement at the Ministerial Conference for the Economic Development of Southeast Asia in 1967. The number of SEAFDEC member countries increased by 2003 to cover all ASEAN nations and Japan. As first drafted, the goals of the Center were to develop the fisheries potential of the region through rational use of resources and to provide food security through research, the transfer of new technologies, and the dissemination of information. Since its inception, SEAFDEC has established departments in four member countries focusing on four sub-sectors in the fisheries field:

- The Training Department (TD) in Thailand focuses on technology transfer in the marine fisheries sector through training and research. The training is conducted principally in the fields of marine engineering, navigation, fishing technology, and extension methodologies, while the research covers fishing technologies, fishing gear improvement, fishing ground surveys, and the socioeconomic profiles of fisheries.
- The Marine Fishery Research Department (MFRD) in Singapore specializes in fisheries post-harvest technologies to optimize the use of marine catches. This involves research on the development of new products, especially underutilized fish products, as well as improved methods for preservation, processing, packaging, shelf life enhancement, quality control, and harmonization of quality standards.
- The Aquaculture Department (AQD) in the Philippines conducts research on the generation and improvement of aquaculture technology covering aspects of brood stock development, hatchery management, nursery operations, feed development, fish nutrition, and disease management.
- The Marine Fishery Resource Development and Management Department (MFRDMD) in Malaysia provides assistance to member countries in developing and managing marine fisheries resources through stock assessment, investigations on resource exploitation, and activities to conserve coral reefs and endangered marine animals such as sea turtles.

Each of these four SEAFDEC departments is voluntarily funded by the member country that hosts it.

SEAFDEC ROLES

SEAFDEC has carried out its tasks in fisheries development to meet the requirements set forth at its inception in 1967. The Center has also provided a platform for south-south cooperation among the member countries through its various programs at the departments. Given that considerable disparities remain in the levels of fisheries development of the member countries, these tasks to develop fisheries in the region are still an important obligation for SEAFDEC. Another important task has been to reduce the disparity among member countries that consist of various economic levels.

The principle of sustainability in the development of fisheries has gained worldwide recognition over the past decade. SEAFDEC and its member countries well recognize that the requirements for sustainability are commensurate with the requirements of the times, namely, that the fishery sector pay due regard to the conservation and management of fishery resources and environmental considerations in fishery development. Through various attempts to address these requirements, such as the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Millennium Conference in 2001, the policies and activities of SEAFDEC are now moving in new directions. The Center has adopted the keyword “sustainability” as it works for fisheries of the region, and in keeping with the guidelines set forth in the Action Plan adopted at the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Millennium Conference, the Center has undertaken various prioritized programs for the relevant fishery sectors focusing on sustainable fisheries.

The range of SEAFDEC's competence is wide, covering research, development of technology, transfer of technology competency, dissemination of knowledge, and harmonization of regional policy. In its research, the Center also deals with fisheries technology, marine engineering, aquaculture technology, socioeconomic science, the population dynamics of resources, biology (including taxonomy), food safety, and post-harvest technologies.

In implementing research and programs, SEAFDEC takes advantage of the unique mechanisms maintained by each of its technical arms. Each department covering the four main sub-sectors of the fisheries—the TD, MFRD, AQD, and MFRDMD—provides physical technical platforms and support in implementing research and programs. As the Center implements its research and other activities, another unique feature is its work to organize member country participation in regional programs as comprehensively as possible. SEAFDEC has the full capacity to conduct pilot projects.

Now, 35 years long years after the inception of SEAFDEC, member countries consist of both grant-aid-program-eligible countries and countries that have graduated from the grant aid program. This promotes the heterogeneous condition to develop the scope of the application of the SEAFDEC program. In other words, heterogeneity in the level of economic development of the member countries makes it important for SEAFDEC to consider the program as a regional initiative focusing on harmonized fisheries development in light of the real requirements of its member countries. Thus, it has become increasingly important for SEAFDEC to take a multilateral approach, including programs to equalize the capacity building of the member countries in a harmonized manner and to generate state-of-the-art technologies and knowledge in the fisheries field as befits a leading organization for member countries.

In this connection, SEAFDEC recognizes the importance of both regional training and cooperative activity for member countries through its various programs. It also recognizes the need to improve its own abilities to live up to the expectations of member countries in terms of competence and responsibilities.

As the names of the relevant departments in the Center clearly illustrate, the existing SEAFDEC functions are particular to marine fisheries. Since the entry of Laos PRD, a landlocked country without marine fisheries, into the SEAFDEC program, the Center has also inaugurated and enhanced its ability in the new field of inland fisheries. SEAFDEC has thus invigorated its competence to support fisheries development of member countries taking account of the economic importance of inland fisheries in the member countries. In the fields related to inland fisheries, capture fisheries technology, aquaculture technology, socioeconomic research, taxonomy, and the utilization of technology are relatively new areas for the SEAFDEC departments. Thus, of necessity, SEAFDEC has recently devoted some resources to inland-fisheries-related activities.

SEAFDEC also recognizes the need to focus more closely on food safety and environmental-related issues as relatively new areas in the Center's competence. In reflecting the recently increased public concerns about food safety, a common policy must be established to address issues of pesticide and hazardous chemical residues in the fish products attributable to environmental contamination. Further, SEAFDEC has been newly examining the current environmental issues that have adverse impacts on fisheries in the region, including conservation of sea turtles and other endangered species.

CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES FOR SEAFDEC

Regarding the support extended to SEAFDEC, the member countries hosting the four SEAFDEC departments have shouldered the burden and responsibility of maintaining the departments since their establishment. Since its inception, SEAFDEC has also enjoyed comprehensive and constant financial and technical support from the Japanese government to promote the implementation of its activities. However, current changes in the financial condition and the government's policy for Official Development Assistance

(ODA) are causing some uneasiness within SEAFDEC and worries over its future activities. As Japan, the major contributor to SEAFDEC, has moved towards bilateral technical cooperation with individual countries, the function of the international organization in technical cooperation should be newly considered. If budgetary constraints are forcing funding sources to place new priority on cost performance in support of the technical cooperation, then SEAFDEC needs to better recognize the support and cooperation from international organizations covering the regional activities in member countries, as well as the effectiveness of regional activities conducted by international organizations to extend cooperation to individual countries in a harmonized manner (versus the generally more limited ripple effect from bilateral cooperation on extension). As it becomes more difficult for SEAFDEC to procure constant and stable support in the form of financial and technical contributions based on favor from its member countries, the Center must demonstrate the effectiveness of its activities to its members and find alternative resources rather than relying solely on the generosity of the ODA. In this connection, these two objectives—establishing the outcomes of the programs and finding wider resources rather than depending solely on favor of ODA—are becoming important subjects in the management of SEAFDEC and other international organizations that promote technical cooperation.

To address the first objective with respect to technical cooperation, SEAFDEC is now forced to consider alternative sources for technical cooperation and collaboration through the international cooperative arrangements with other institutions and other organizations in order to offset the reduced support from ODA. In foreseeing the future direction of the cooperation, and heeding the effectiveness of research and development activities in the region, a number of very important factors must not be neglected. With just a quick glance around Southeast Asia, one can recognize the tremendous potential of the universities and national laboratories of the region. Many reliable and competent institutions in the region are fully capable of conducting collaborative research and studies in the fisheries field. These institutions are already undertaking numerous cooperative activities through various channels with international academic society and donors.

As a long-term policy to survive as a competent and reliable international organization and to implement various activities for the dissemination of knowledge, technology, and extension programs through pilot programs, SEAFDEC could compensate for the reduced levels of comprehensive technical support from ODA by taking advantage of the functions and capacities of reliable existing technical institutions in the member countries based upon individual arrangements for cooperation.

Many forms of international cooperation are undertaken among many technical and academic institutions, yet most take a project-based form. While project-based cooperation is very important for improving the capacity of institutions, its usefulness for to SEAFDEC, an organization that seeks to support the development of member countries, has limits. As an organization that focuses on the extension of its activities in member countries and training member countries at various levels of the economic spectrum, it could be one idea that SEAFDEC bases its relationships not only on projects, but also on long-term collaboration, or more specifically, the establishment of a collaborative framework in which SEAFDEC could best function in individual member countries.

The circumstances of international organizations often differ. While it is premature to say whether SEAFDEC will remain an intergovernmental organization that supports programs to promote sustainability in development in the fisheries field through technical cooperation in member countries, the Center should consider reliable schemes and services within member countries to facilitate research and technical development of fisheries. In this connection, it will be crucial to review how to develop collaborative institutional schemes among member countries in the international cooperation with SEAFDEC. This collaborative institution scheme might entail the recruitment of reliable national laboratories and research agencies in member countries as collaborative agencies and to entrust them with the functions of the SEAFDEC departments as local implementing agencies. Alternatively, this collaborative institution scheme might entail the direct involvement of member countries in SEAFDEC programs, including the adoption of a

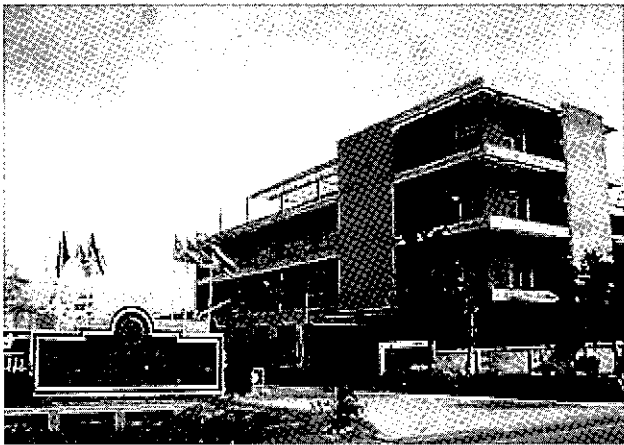
cost-share policy in implementing activities.

The adoption of such frameworks would likely require changes in the authority entrusted to SEAFDEC in the establishing agreement of 1967. Moreover, the fruitful establishment of the results of SEAFDEC activities in member countries might be regarded as essential to promote the deeper involvement of member countries.

With respect to the second subject, establishing the outcome of the programs in the SEAFDEC member countries, it has become increasingly important to recognize ownership of the programs by member countries. Without such recognition, it would be very difficult to expect the outcome of any program to be recognized or established anywhere. For this very reason, an international organization may fret that, unless the recipient country of a program recognizes the ownership of the program, the program may be terminated or withdrawn in spite of fruitful results it has yielded, thereby causing difficulties for the recipient country.

A cost-sharing policy appears to be an ideal mechanism for introducing program ownership systems in recipient countries. In looking around at SEAFDEC member countries, one can clearly understand the difficulty of introducing a unified cost-sharing policy in some regions due to demonstrably different levels of economic development. Nonetheless, SEAFDEC has adopted the cost-sharing policy for the implementation of specific programs in all member countries as a matter of principle, whatever the shares turn out to be.

This concept is not limited to the issues that SEAFDEC faces. Development of ownership of programs



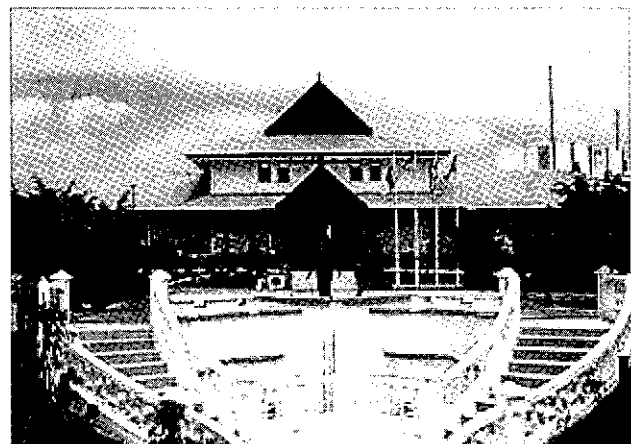
Training Dept., Bangkok



Marine Fishery Research Dept., Singapore



Aquaculture Dept., Tigbauan, Iloilo



Marine Fishery Resource Development and Management Dept., Kuak Terengganu

Fig. a, b, c and d. Pictorial views of four departments of SEAFDEC

or activities through cost sharing may be a key solution for any number of organizations looking for ways to effectively extend their cooperation activities outside of home countries.

From the viewpoint of national economic growth, primary industries such as fisheries are often neglected as out of date or forgotten sectors in the course industrial development due to growth constraints inherent to their nature. However, it should be remembered primary industries play important roles for national economic development, socio-economic stability, alleviation of poverty in rural areas, and food security not only developing countries, but developed countries like Japan.

In this connection, international cooperation toward sound primary industries is still an important and political agenda in the world.

Thus, international organizations like SEAFDEC need to find ways to enhance international cooperation and collaborative activities with reliable research institutions and other international organizations in order to realize sound primary industries.

In the fishery field in Southeast Asia, SEAFDEC is ready to promote collaborative activities in order to meet its important responsibilities entrusted by member countries.