

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

TWENTY-FOURTH REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES
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COORDINATION OF REGIONAL FISHERIES TRAINING
(Paper prepared by the Secretariat)

SPC REGIONAL FISHERIES TRAINING PROJECT

1 The SPC Regional Fisheries Training Project (RFTP) was established in 1985. Its express aims were to coordinate fisheries training and manpower development activities in the region, and to assist SPC member countries meet training needs that were not provided for under existing training programmes available to the region. In 1990, the goals, objectives, and activities of the project were restated in the booklet "The Fisheries Programmes of the South Pacific Commission" as follows:

Goal: By coordinating and, where appropriate, generating training opportunities, the RFTP will act as a vehicle for enhancing the transfer of fisheries related skills and knowledge to Pacific Island nationals. In particular, it will focus on specific vocational areas not normally addressed by established training programmes, and on non-formal or hands-on training to individuals who may not have extensive educational backgrounds.

Objectives: (i) Assist Pacific Island countries plan manpower training programmes more effectively and make best use of available training opportunities.

(ii) Develop training programmes in areas where existing opportunities do not fully satisfy Pacific Island country requirements.

Activities: (i) On an ongoing basis, review and evaluate existing fisheries training opportunities available to Pacific Island countries and disseminate information on these opportunities;

(ii) Assess current and projected fisheries training requirements of individual SPC member countries and territories;

(iii) Conduct or organise national and international technical training courses and workshops in subject fields identified in consultation with governments of SPC member countries as priority areas requiring attention.

2 The specific activities of the RFTP have been reviewed and discussed annually at consecutive RTMF meetings since its establishment in 1985. The RFTP has been involved in a very wide range of training activities covering a variety of subject areas. In response to the requests for project assistance received from member countries, the major focus of the project has been on the implementation of training programmes (objective ii and activity iii). Despite being an important part of the project's mandate, issues relating to the overall coordination of training activities in the region (objective i, activities i and ii), have not been a major project focus because these issues have not generally been raised as priority during ongoing contact and liaison with member governments.

3 There are nevertheless some ongoing project activities that have a bearing on training coordination and information dissemination. The most important of these are the Directory of Fisheries Training Opportunities project, and the Regional Fisheries Personnel Database.

Directory of Fisheries Training Opportunities

4 The original version of this directory was produced and circulated in 1986. Its aim was to provide SPC member countries with a comprehensive reference to available training opportunities that could serve as a planning tool for in-service training programme development. In 1990 it was decided to revise the 1986 edition, after which the word-processed information would be converted to a database format. This would enable regular updating and the provision of current information on training opportunities to countries periodically or on request.

5 A draft of the revised directory has now been completed by the external consultant engaged to carry out this task. However, the aim to print and distribute it by the end of 1991 has not been met. Editorial review by RFTP staff identified problems relating to the currency and relevance of some entries, and the standardisation of information provided with each reference. Particular attention will be given to deciding which of the many somewhat marginal entries should be included in the final version as being appropriate to Pacific Island fisheries personnel.

6 A second consultant has been contracted to undertake the conversion of the directory to CDS/ISIS format, using the existing ICOD Fisheries Training Database as a model. This will enable the RFTP to continue to update and upgrade the directory as courses and institutions change and develop. The database should be available for distribution, on diskette or in hard copy, by December 1992.

Regional Fisheries Personnel Database

7 Maintenance of this database, which serves as a repository for personnel information on individuals from Pacific Island countries, is an ongoing RFTP activity. Data on the training and employment histories of all SPC course nominees and information obtained from the HRD survey having been entered during 1992. The database now holds entries for more than half of the region's fisheries personnel and will continue to be added to as further information comes to hand. The RFTP is keen to develop appropriate mechanisms to acquire additional information and increase the coverage of the database.

8. The database is intended to serve as a tool for course and syllabus development, statistical analysis, and more efficient planning of training programmes, both by member countries and the RFTP. However, although this usage is expected to grow as the database becomes more complete and correspondingly more useful as a planning tool, there has only been one outside request for database information (from a donor) during the past six months. This suggests a need to promote the potential role of the database as well as continue efforts to complete and expand it.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (HRD) SURVEY

9. In 1990, SPC member countries supported the concept of a survey of "Human Resource Development and Planning in the Pacific Islands Fisheries Sector". The goal of the survey was to re-examine the status of human resource development in the fisheries sector in the region, and to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the emphasis that has been placed on training in recent years. The survey, which was carried out in 1991, reported its findings in detail to the 23rd RTMF.

10. The survey team identified a number of inadequacies which existed to a greater or lesser degree in most of the countries visited, and which conspired to constrain effective implementation of HRD planning and strategies. These were summarised as follows:

- the lack of effective regional coordination of education and training;
- the absence of long-term human resource development plans;
- the project-oriented approach to fisheries development in the absence of overall fisheries development policy;
- the lack of public awareness about fisheries resources, careers, and the principles of sustainable development;
- the failure of government systems, e.g. personnel and education, to sustain the pace of development;
- the lack of effort in resource assessment;
- the reluctance by donor agencies to support in-country and/or regional educational institutions;
- the immediate need for management training for senior fisheries staff;
- the need to provide development opportunities to support privatisation;

11. In response to these identified deficiencies, the survey team made 109 recommendations addressed directly to national governments and 47 recommendations of a more general nature. Four of the general recommendations were of direct relevance to the work of the RFTP, and three of them concerned issues relating to HRD and training coordination, as follows:

i) *A Regional Fisheries Training Coordinator position should be established, preferably within an existing regional institution or programme. The duties of the Coordinator would be to:*

- a) *provide advice and assistance in national human resource development planning;*
- b) *provide education and training programme information;*
- c) *undertake evaluations and follow-up on training activities;*
- d) *act as liaison between national administrations, educational and donor communities;*
- e) *maintain a regional personnel database.*

ii) *The Regional Fisheries Education and Training Coordinator should convene and chair an annual meeting of donors, educational institutions and national government representatives to discuss human resource development issues. The meeting should be held in conjunction with a regular meeting of an appropriate regional organisation.*

iii) *The completion and regular maintenance of an up-to-date fisheries personnel database should be a regional priority task assigned to the proposed Regional Fisheries Education and Training Officer.*

12 Following discussion of these recommendations, the 23rd RTMF:

"...accepted that there was a need for improved coordination of education and training within the region. The meeting recommended that SPC, by the most appropriate means and as soon as possible, obtain the views of donors, educational institutes, and regional agencies, in order to determine how best to achieve that improvement and report to member Governments on the outcome of these consultations".

COUNTRY RESPONSE

13 As directed, the RFTP has taken every opportunity to solicit opinion from donors, educational institutions, and regional agencies as to appropriate mechanisms for improvement in regional fisheries training coordination. This has been done through opportunistic dialogue during regional gatherings, through duty travel by professional staff, and through correspondence.

14 The general consensus of views is that the HRD survey has provided a useful overview as to the status of HRD planning in SPC member countries, but that most countries still lack appropriate mechanisms to develop and institute rational manpower development plans and strategies. It is felt that, although the detailed country-specific recommendations of the HRD survey outline courses of action for individual departments and divisions to facilitate the development of appropriate national-level HRD strategies, it is beyond the scope of individual departments or divisions to address many of the issues raised in the survey report without the active cooperation of governments and bureaucracies.

15 As regards coordination at the regional level, the following consensus viewpoints arose.

16 *Coordination of fisheries training and education in the region depends on cooperation between funding donors, training institutions and national administrations.* The inability of some parts of the training establishment to be adequately flexible is likely to be a major obstacle to coordination. Examples include the aid policies that prevent many bilateral donors from funding training programmes outside the donor country, and the fact that some island countries continue to sponsor participants to courses that are inappropriate or ill-conceived simply because funding is available, or fail to evaluate courses (or their own course participants) thoroughly enough. The present un-coordinated, *ad hoc* fisheries training situation is likely to persist unless there is a positive desire on the part of all the organisations involved to support activities designed to improve coordination.

17 *The need for greater coordination would not necessarily be met by the establishment of a Regional Fisheries Training Coordinator position, either within an existing organisation or as an independent entity.* The SPC RFTP was established with a mandate to promote the coordination of fisheries training activities in the region, in exactly the same way as the post now being proposed in the HRD study. The fact that the RFTP has made only limited headway in this area is due in part to the circumstances noted in the previous paragraph, and in part to individual countries giving regional coordination a lower priority than the implementation of training activities aimed at solving short-term national problems. This topic has been raised regularly at SPC RTMF's since the mid-1980's (see for example SPC/ Fisheries 18/ WP.11 and SPC/ Fisheries 20/ WP.12). None of the donors, regional organisations, training bodies and SPC member countries consulted were of the view that the creation of the proposed new position, whether in a regional organisation or elsewhere, would have a major impact on the problem in the absence of other initiatives related to the problems mentioned in the previous paragraph.

18 *The establishment and development of improved mechanisms for the distribution of information on training and education activities and opportunities could play a major role in improving overall coordination.* Many island countries claim to be inadequately informed of the training opportunities available to them, or to have insufficient opportunities to obtain relevant information and advice. There is a clear need to improve the flow of information in such a way that island countries can make more informed choices of suitable training programmes based on a full knowledge of the options available. There is also a need to document existing levels of training within fisheries departments and the fishing industry more effectively and to make this information available to training institutions and donors. This information will allow for improved course and curriculum planning and help avoid unnecessary duplication of training activities.

SPC PERSPECTIVE

19 In view of the above, the Secretariat's position regarding the issue of training coordination is that, while we agree with the deficiencies identified by the HRD study team, we do not support the response outlined in the first recommendation of the HRD study (paragraph 11, part (i) above). The Secretariat supports the gist of the second recommendation, in that periodic meetings of donors, educational institutions and national government representatives (such as the present workshop) are a useful step to improving training coordination. However, these can be convened as required within any of the existing regional fora (RTMF, FFC, etc) and this recommendation need not be linked to the establishment of a Regional Fisheries Education and Training Coordinator position. The third recommendation is supported in full, and in fact the database project is now well under way at SPC.

20 The Secretariat's view is that as a first step towards improving coordination of fisheries education and training in the region, a major effort needs to be made to improve the flow of appropriate information and advice available to countries, training institutions and donors. This could be done through the upgrading and improvement of several ongoing mechanisms, and the establishment of new ones, as follows.

Directory of Fisheries Training Opportunities

21 This directory will shortly be converted to a database, at which point it will be possible to keep the information up to date and to provide information summaries to individuals or member countries routinely and on request. Passive maintenance of the database, i.e. entering unsolicited information that is routinely received at the Commission, is within the capacity of the RFTP to undertake with no additional resources and with no change in prioritisation of activities. Active expansion of the database, which involves extensive correspondence and the handling of greater volumes of information, would require a reprioritisation of ongoing work or additional manpower resources.

Regional Fisheries Personnel Database

22 If given a higher priority within the RFTP, this database on fisheries personnel could be substantially expanded within about 12 months to give more or less complete coverage of the SPC region. This would provide information on the manpower situation in individual countries and in the region as a whole and would be an invaluable tool in the development of manpower plans and training strategies by national governments and regional bodies, and for curriculum development by national and international training institutions. This could only be done through the use of additional manpower, or at the expense of ongoing field training activities.

Special Interest Group on Fisheries Education and Training

23 To establish a formal conduit for information exchange and dissemination, the RFTP has assessed the possibility of working with the Fisheries Information Project (FIP) to establish a Special Interest Group (SIG) devoted to fisheries training and educational interests. The SIG would function in the same way as the other SIGs established by the Fisheries Information Project (see WP.3, section 3.3.1), by serving as a formal network of individuals working in this subject area. As part of the SIG, SPC would produce a bi-annual Information Bulletin which would carry topical information relevant to the interests of the group. This would probably consist in the main of updates on specific training programmes and opportunities available, information on sources of educational and training materials, and summary data taken from the two databases mentioned above.

HRD advisory services

24 In addition to these specific mechanisms to promote greater information flow, the RFTP remains open to country requests for assistance in developing, reviewing, and implementing HRD plans and strategies. The production of development strategies and plans will allow specific identification of further training requirements. Once this is done, it becomes possible more efficiently to plan and coordinate training activities at both national and regional levels, particularly in respect to obtaining longer term funding commitments. Attention to HRD strategies and planning is thus an integral component of effective training coordination. It is hoped that countries will continue to place emphasis on improving national HRD planning capacities, if necessary calling on the resources of regional organisations to assist them.

PROPOSED SPC ACTION

25 At present, the principal constraint on greater RFTP involvement in training coordination and information activities is lack of manpower. This is in itself due primarily to the priority given within the project to developing and implementing training programmes. Project personnel have so far accorded time to database and directory development as a secondary activity. Reclassifying these activities as high priority would lead to more effort being expended in this area, but at the expense of a somewhat reduced ability to organise and run training courses in response to country request.

26 An alternative approach, which would enable greater attention to information and coordination activities without impinging on the project's ability to deliver field training programmes, would be to establish a new junior professional post within the project. The principal duties associated with this post would be to:

- establish and maintain the Fisheries Education and Training Special Interest Group;
- assist in the production and distribution of the SIG Information Bulletin;
- update and maintain the regional fisheries personnel database and the fisheries training opportunities database;
- perform database searches and produce data summaries in response to information requests;
- coordinate responses to other information requests from Pacific Island governments and individuals

27 The Secretariat believes that the establishment of an additional junior professional post of this type within the RFTP would be more appropriate to the needs of the region than the creation of a Fisheries Education and Training Coordinator position, and would enhance the project's capacity to support the coordination of training activities in the region.

CONCLUSION

28 Improved coordination of training and education in the fisheries sector is clearly still an issue in the region. An important step towards improving the level of coordination would be to improve the flow of information on training opportunities and requirements.

29 The Commission already has activities in place that partly serve this purpose. These could be upgraded by giving them higher priority in the existing work programme (at the expense of ongoing activities) or, preferably, by providing the RFTP with additional manpower resources. This should be in the form of a junior professional person to support the dissemination of information, rather than a Regional Fisheries Education and Training Coordinator as recommended by the HRD study.

30 The meeting is invited to discuss the issues presented in this paper. If increased RFTP involvement in the coordination of fisheries training activities in the region is required, the meeting is invited to make recommendations to the South Pacific Conference as appropriate.
