



tBrief Edition #1

TRANSPARENCY IN FISHERIES:

Not as clear as it seems?

3 take aways from this tBrief:

Fisheries might have been slow to catch on to the transparency wave, but it is now widely accepted as being fundamental to sustainable fisheries management; yet, the subject is not straightforward at all.

- 1** The management of fisheries by governments, the activities of fishing vessels, and product traceability are all major issues now subject to calls for more transparency. Appreciating and recognising their different objectives, approaches, and different stakeholder expectations is paramount.
- 2** Transparency should not be seen simply as the act of providing information in the public domain (visibility), but also ensuring that such information allows others to draw reliable conclusions from it (inferability).
- 3** Transparency will not “magically” lead to positive change all by itself, and increased transparency can end up failing to meet people’s expectations. How transparency is defined and approached as well as its enabling conditions are critical.



Fisheries
Transparency
Initiative

Introduction

Over the past few decades, and perhaps really in the late 2000s, ‘transparency’ has gained an enormous amount of attention in governance reforms. It has led not only to an extraordinary number of international agreements, programmes and initiatives, but also of critical reflection over its meaning, purpose and outcomes.

Fisheries might have been slow to catch on to the transparency wave, but for the past few years the concept has become increasingly mainstreamed in fisheries discussions. Perhaps the moment when this became apparent was when the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) published its annual State of the World Fisheries Report in 2010. It was the first-time transparency was mentioned prominently by the FAO as being of central importance to various problems affecting marine fisheries worldwide:



Lack of basic transparency could be seen as an underlying facilitator of all the negative aspects of the global fisheries sector – IUU fishing, fleet overcapacity, overfishing, ill-directed subsidies, corruption, poor fisheries management decisions, etc. A more transparent sector would place a spotlight on such activities whenever they occur, making it harder for perpetrators to hide behind the current veil of secrecy and requiring immediate action to be taken to correct the wrong.



Since then the frequency of reports and presentations that argue for greater transparency in fisheries has expanded substantially. The arguments for transparency stem from multiple interests and concerns. This includes growing consumer campaigns about the sustainability of seafood products, mounting evidence about unethical business practices in the fishing sector, including slave-like labour conditions for fish workers in parts of the world. But also a growing acceptance that problems confronting coastal communities and small-scale fisheries, including conflicts with industrial fisheries, are rooted in political struggles and that people’s sense of injustice is closely linked with their frustrations over a lack of openness and accountability of those in power.

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This so called “transparency Brief” (or tBrief for short), provided by the Fisheries Transparency Initiative¹, is the first in a series that will try to discuss this global interest in more detail, including reviewing the evidence of lack of transparency in different aspects of fisheries, looking at emerging priorities (such as beneficial ownership transparency), as well as critically debating the effectiveness of transparency reforms for divergent groups and interests, such as small-scale fisheries, large-scale seafood companies, those fighting illegal fishing, and for governments wanting to develop a sustainable blue economy.

In the following pages we look quite broadly at the subject and set out a number of basic questions in the hope to stimulate interest and debate. This is simplified into **four questions: What specifically does transparency in fisheries cover? What do we mean by the word transparency? What are the reasons for a lack of transparency and then finally, what are the assumptions being made about the impact of increasing transparency?** As will be evident, the concept of transparency in fisheries is possibly not as clear or unproblematic as some may assume.

1 The Fisheries Transparency Initiative is a global multi-stakeholder partnership that seeks to increase transparency and participation in fisheries governance for the benefit of a more sustainable management of marine fisheries.



1. Transparency of what?

While it may be a fairly new priority for fisheries reforms, it is clear that transparency in the fisheries sector is expansive, and at the same time can be a quite diverse and potentially confusing subject. Many of the elements included in campaigns for transparency are established in international agreements and documents on fisheries reforms. The need for governments to act in a transparent way was included in FAO's landmark Code of Conduct on Responsible Fisheries (1995)². Transparency is also listed by the FAO as one of the core principles for States to follow in the 2012 Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Governance of Tenure in Land, Fisheries and Forests,³ as well as the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries finalised in 2014.⁴ While these texts provide some specific requests for governments to follow, transparency is, however, discussed in a fairly general way. This leaves much open to debate on exactly what information ought to be made public, by whom and why.

As a starting point, let's look briefly at the range of issues that are now subject to calls for more transparency in the fisheries sector. We can make a simple distinction of three areas where the most emphasis for transparency seems to be:

2 Available at:

<http://www.fao.org/3/v9878e/v9878e00.htm>

3 Available at:

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i2801e.pdf>

4 Available at:

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4356en.pdf>

**Management
of fisheries by
governments**

**Activities
of fishing
vessels**

**Product
traceability**

1a The management of fisheries by governments

As established in international documents, governments are encouraged to share information with the public on tenure and access arrangements (who can use what fisheries resources and under what conditions), how much is being earned in revenues from fisheries, what is the status of fish populations, what are the laws and regulations governing fisheries and fish trade, and how is the government working to ensure fisheries is sustainable and beneficial for society, including the use of government support and transfers to different sectors and interests (i.e. subsidies and development aid). Specific campaigns for transparency have shown that many governments are falling short of these norms. This includes the lack of transparency in fisheries access agreements between foreign fishing nations and developing countries⁵, the lack of information on licensed vessels (which has led to a proposal for a Global Record of fishing vessels)⁶ or the poor public records on fishing quota allocations, as well as very limited data on subsidies.⁷ The latter is now a core focus of discussion on fishing subsidy reforms at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), as governments are requested to publish annual notifications on their transfers. Additionally, as is established in the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on Tenure and in the Guidelines on Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries, in some countries national authorities do not have publicised records of customary rights to fish resources for coastal communities and indigenous peoples, which creates vulnerability for them to encroachment and enclosures.

Addressing these shortcomings was one of the key motivators in establishing the Fisheries Transparency Initiative.

1b The activities of fishing vessels

The fishing industry in many parts of the world has been subject to increasing requirements for providing information to national and regional authorities on their activities, which has led, inter alia, to the mandatory use of satellite monitoring devices and electronic logbooks for large numbers of vessels. Public access to this information is an emerging, albeit contested, focus for civil society campaigns for transparency. Such campaigns are largely motivated by concerns about the ecological degradation of marine resources and habitats, as well as the high levels of under-reporting/misreporting of data by companies,

⁵ The European Union's Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements are arguably the most transparent of fishing access agreements, which is in contrast to those with other fishing nations, such as China, Japan and Russia. For further reading on this see, Standing, A (2016) 'The Mirage of Pirates: State Corporate Crime in the Fishing Sector', International Journal on State Crime.

⁶ See: <http://www.fao.org/global-record/en/>

⁷ Appleton, A. (2017), 'Options for Improving the Transparency of Fisheries Subsidies'. Geneva: International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD). available at: https://www.ictsd.org/sites/default/files/research/options_for_improving_the_transparency_of_fisheries_subsidies.pdf



or their engagement in illegal activities. Collating and publishing geo-referenced data on a per vessel basis derived from vessel monitoring systems is a core objective of initiatives like Global Fishing Watch. This also joins other international campaigns for increasing transparency on transshipments at sea.⁸ The call for public access to information of fishing activities extends to other areas, such as the use, ownership and management of fish aggregating devices, particularly in the tuna fisheries where the use of these has grown exponentially and has increased fishing efficiency enormously.⁹

1c Product Traceability

There has also been a substantial global effort to increase transparency in the origins of fish products and on the social and ecological impact of the underlying fishing operations. Arguably this has been led by third party eco-labelling schemes, such as the Marine Stewardship Council and Friends of the Seas.

The theme of transparency in fish products is continuously evolving. Private sector initiatives are now using DNA testing, seeking to ensure the labelling of fish products can be verified independently, addressing numerous studies that showed significant levels of fraud in fish labelling, both in terms of origin and species.¹⁰ Also, information on the conditions of fish workers and adherence to international agreements on labour standards is increasingly included in such efforts.¹¹ And, there are several efforts to provide consumers with information on precisely which fisher caught the fish, also using technological solutions, such as mobile applications.

In summary, while these three areas may be a simplification and do certainly not capture all trends of transparency in fisheries¹², they make it evident that this topic covers an extensive range of quite complicated issues, with much to be resolved in terms of international norms or expectations on how precisely transparency should be achieved and to what level. But as a starting point, it is suggested that their different objectives, approaches and expectations are appreciated and recognised – instead of summarising everything under the common term of “fisheries transparency”.

- 8 See for example: Pew Charitable Trust, September 2019, “Transshipment in the Western and Central Pacific: Greater understanding and transparency of carrier vessel fleet dynamics would help reform management” <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2019/09/transshipment-in-the-western-and-central-pacific>
- 9 See for example: Alexandra Maufroy, A. (2016). ‘Drifting Fish Aggregating Devices of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans: modalities of use, fishing efficiency and potential management’. Animal biology. Université Montpellier. Available at: <https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-01663770/document>
- 10 See for example, Christensen, J. March 27, 2019, ‘Fish fraud: What’s on the menu often isn’t what’s on your plate’, CNN Online, available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/03/07/health/fish-mislabeling-investigation-oceano/index.html>
- 11 See for example, Nakamura, K., et al, (2018) ‘Seeing slavery in seafood supply chains’, Science Advances 25 Jul. Available at: <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/4/7/e1701833>
- 12 For example, transparency in the profitability of fishing companies is also an emerging theme. The European Commission has, since 2008, requested information on the economic performance of fishing companies from member states as part of its work to inform debates by the European Parliament on fisheries reforms. The issue of fishing company profitability has also been raised in relation to negotiation of benefit sharing arrangements between coastal states for shared fish stocks, as well as on decisions for setting license fees and access agreements.



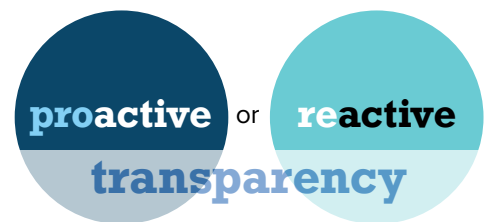
2. What does transparency mean?

While the call for transparency in fisheries seems to be expanding and diversifying, the question of what transparency means is perhaps given inadequate attention. It may be assumed it is straightforward to define, but often the word has caused confusion and misleading claims.

A simple distinction can be made on how organisations achieve transparency. This can either be through **proactively** publishing information, or it can be through providing information on demand; what is sometimes known as **reactive transparency**. It is widely accepted that both forms of transparency should co-exist; governments should ensure substantial information is in the public domain without people having to ask for it, but they should also be open to request for specific information if a citizen wants to know.¹³

When it comes to **proactive transparency**, generally it is now accepted that publishing information in easy to navigate websites at no fee is what governments, companies and other organisations should be doing. Still, in many places information on fisheries remains paper-based, and therefore difficult for people to access. Sometimes fees are included, and where there are websites these can be exceedingly cumbersome to navigate. The global movement for 'open government', and particularly the Open Government Partnership launched in 2011, has developed thinking about how governments can publicise important information more effectively, including in ways that target the most marginalised groups in society. Otherwise, more affluent or privileged groups can benefit from transparency initiatives more than others.¹⁴

The extent to which organisations achieve good levels of **reactive transparency** is much harder to know. In many countries this has been improved by robust freedom of information laws, as well as institutions that ensure these laws are respected. Arguably the most comprehensive binding treaty on transparency that is relevant to fisheries is the commonly known Aarhus Convention.¹⁵ This provides legal assurance that citizens are guaranteed answers from governments within a set time frame, they do not need to establish a reason for asking for specific environmental information, and governments must consider public interests as more important than commercial confidentiality. A very similarly worded convention was signed by 21 States in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2018, commonly known as the Escazu Convention.



13 Darbyshire, H. (2010), 'Proactive Transparency: The Future of the Right to Information?' World Bank Group, Washington. Available at: <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/pdf/10.1596/25031>

14 Fung, A, et al. (2004) The Political Economy of Transparency: What makes disclosure policies effective?, Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation, available at: https://ash.harvard.edu/files/political_econ_transparency.pdf

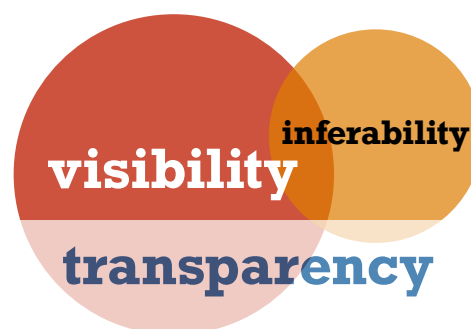
15 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's Convention on Access to Information, Participation in Decision Making and access to Justice on Environmental Matters



However, it is well established that even in countries with excellent freedom of information laws their governments often have a very restrictive and inconsistent approach to responding to information demands and there are no reliable systems for complaints and redress. Research on this problem has also revealed that who asks for information can matter in some countries. A survey undertaken by the Open Justice Initiative used a range of people in countries to ask their governments, both in person and in writing, for specific information. The results showed that women were less successful than men at getting responses, and people from poorer sections of society were also discriminated against.¹⁶ As a recognition of the scale of this problem, access to information is included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (target 16.10).

In addition to understanding how transparency can be achieved, it is also important to look at another critical (but often overlooked) dimension, which is *inferability*. Commonly, transparency is simply equated to *visibility* – whether or not certain types of data are in the public domain. Consequently, many transparency efforts, such as transparency indexes, follow this view, having a single focus on getting governments or companies to publish certain types of documents and facts and figures. Yet, many discussions argue that this is too narrow a view, and that is why *inferability* – information is transparent if it allows someone to draw reliable conclusions from it¹⁷ - is equally important. One area where this can be seen is with civil society complaints about fishing quota allocations. While these allocations might be in the public domain, the decisions of governments choosing to ignore scientific advice is left poorly articulated. For this reason, the NGO Client Earth submitted in 2019 a legal complaint to the European Commission about the lack of public information on the decisions to allocate fishing quotas between member states.¹⁸

It can therefore be argued that by combining these elements of **transparency** – **visibility** and **inferability** – it is impossible to arrive at any firm conclusions on how transparent something is, simply by looking at whether certain data or documents exist in the public domain. It is a good start, but it may not tell the entire story. How accessible the information is, to what extent this information is perceived as credible, and what questions it helps to answer, are all vital issues to consider as well. In the case of the Fisheries Transparency Initiative, we included these aspects in our procedural requirements for the analysis of government transparency, which is lead in each country by a national Multi-Stakeholder Group, comprising of government, business and civil society representatives.



16 Open Society Justice Initiative, (2014) 'Transparency and Silence: A Survey of Access to Information Laws and Practices in 14 Countries', available at: <https://www.justiceinitiative.org/publications/transparency-and-silence-survey-access-information-laws-and-practices-14-countries>

17 Michenera, G. & Bersch, K. (2013), 'Identifying transparency', *Information Polity* 18: 233–242, available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4ac7/5190784e6e6c337d61ce86d45718a910bfaf.pdf>

18 Client Earth, April 17 2019, "We challenge EU's lack of transparency around fishing quotas", available at: <https://www.clientearth.org/we-challenge-eus-lack-of-transparency-around-fishing-quotas/>

3. Does fisheries lack transparency, and if so why?

The growing list of reports and initiatives seeking more transparency in fisheries suggests the fishing sector has a severe problem. Certainly, there is much evidence that levels of transparency are not very good in many places, such as with the low levels of government reporting on subsidies, poor records of tenure arrangements and a widespread sense that governments are often not transparent in their decisions on quota allocations and other key fisheries policies.

We will review the evidence on specific areas of fisheries transparency in subsequent tBriefs. However, in advance of this it is worth pointing out that existing research on transparency in the fisheries sector covering a range of information and across large numbers of coastal states and fishing businesses is still patchy. It is therefore difficult to know whether transparency in fisheries is improving or not, whether it is better or worse in some regions or groups of countries or how the fisheries sector compares with others. Indeed, as stated above, notions of accessibility, reliability and completeness of information would all have to be considered as well. Furthermore, it is important to know whether governments and businesses would share information with the public if asked to, including where requests for information were made in relation to freedom of information laws. Research into transparency would be much stronger and more useful if it considered both proactive and reactive transparency.

While the question of ‘how good/bad it is’ is therefore challenging to answer, a related issue is understanding why authorities or companies act in an un-transparent way?

An assumption made about lack of transparency is that this is a deliberate state of affairs, driven by the desire to hide information from public scrutiny. Governments that are judged to have low levels of transparency are often perceived to be less democratic and more prone to corruption. Companies that act in an opaque way are suspected of dubious business practices.



However, what is perceived as opacity or secretive attitudes could be caused by other factors. A consistent finding in research on open government is that government agencies fall down on transparency simply because they do not have the resources. The growing list of demands on what needs to be published and how agencies must respond to requests for information add up to a considerable investment in technology, expertise and staff. Research on progress on the Open Government Partnership has shown that about half of the commitments made by governments have not been implemented, and that the most common reason was a lack of government funding.¹⁹ It is understandable that some organisations, particularly those that are underfunded to begin with, may not prioritise transparency. Of course, this may also be a convenient excuse to avoid scrutiny.

Additionally, what may appear to be a lack of transparency is in fact the result of organisations not having the information that they ought to, which is either because the analysis has not been done at all, or information is scattered among different agencies that struggle to communicate with each other. It is speculated that this might be one of the reasons why information on subsidies to the fisheries sector is not delivered to the WTO, and what is delivered is often of very poor quality.²⁰

Finally, another reason for stalling on transparency has to do with legal uncertainty. Again, this was discovered as one of the important factors limiting progress on Open Government Partnership commitments. Primarily this involves the perception that privacy laws and norms protecting commercially sensitive information by governments restricts their ability to share data with the public. This is a critical issue in fisheries, particularly where civil society seeks information on the activities of fishing vessels. A proposal for the FiTI Standard²¹ was to include per vessel reporting on annual catches. However, this was deemed by some to represent commercially sensitive information that governments are not allowed to make public. As this was a contentious issue with no legal certainty, the final decision was to allow a degree of flexibility on this area for each country, with a minimum requirement that States publish aggregated catch information for fishing fleets sharing the same flag state.

19 Falla, R, (2017), 'Why OG Commitments fall behind', Open Government Partnership, available at: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2001/01/IRM_Technical-Paper_Failure_Dec2017.pdf

20 Appleton (2017) Op.Cit.

21 The FiTI Standard defines for the first time what information on fisheries should be published online by public authorities!



4. What do we hope to achieve by increasing transparency?

The wide range of topics in fisheries that are being linked to increased transparency show there are quite diverse objectives linked to the concept.

»» A central assumption is that increasing the flow of information on government, corporate or other organisations' activities improves the ability to hold them to account. In recent times there has been a particular focus on how transparency can address illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.²² It is argued that governments sharing more information about the activities and ownership of vessels will allow civil society to play a stronger role in assisting them to identify criminal activities.

»» Others have argued that transparency diminishes or even deters the opportunities for corruption in fisheries, or the abuse of power by authorities, such as when decisions on fishing authorisations are seemingly based on bribery or conflicts of interest. Similarly, the global call for transparency on fishing subsidies has been explained as creating an opportunity for 'naming and shaming' the worst offenders.²³

»» In contrast, transparency can also be motivated by making neglected issues more visible. Thus, transparency of information for small-scale fisheries, which includes documenting and publicising their customary rights, is about being acknowledged and valued, as is made clear in the global campaign 'too big to ignore'.²⁴

»» Another motivation for transparency is the role of public information on helping democratic processes. Increasing public information allows for more informed discussions and therefore increased chances of better government decisions and management effectiveness. As one FAO report puts it: "transparency in the processes of management tends to deliver better outcomes in fisheries sustainability".²⁵ The same argument has been made about the effectiveness of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations.

»» Closely related is the idea that governments or companies who increase their transparency benefit from higher levels of public trust and confidence. As such, transparency can be promoted for its ability to deliver economic dividends; more transparent governments will attract investors, while more transparent companies will attract more consumers or perhaps a price premium for their products. Increased information in fisheries supply chains or in government decisions is often bound up with ideas on increasing efficiency in resource allocations or market transactions.

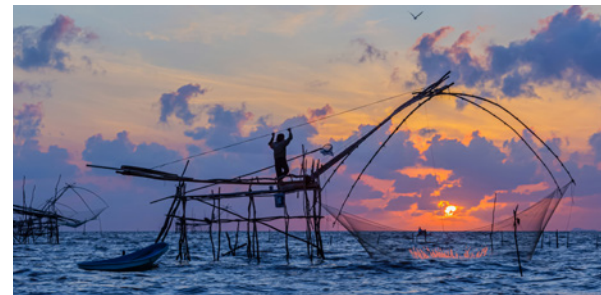
22 EJF (2018) 'Out of the shadows. Improving transparency in global fisheries to stop illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing', Environmental Justice Foundation, London.

23 Forementi (2019) Op.Cit.

24 <http://toobigtoignore.net>

25 Tingley, G. & Dunn, M., Eds. (2018). Op. Cit.

26 Ardron, J. (2015), 'Evaluating the basic elements of transparency of regional fisheries management organizations', Marine Policy no.57.



As we can see, the simple idea of transparency is therefore attached to a complex and potentially contrasting list of objectives:

»» *it is promoted as a way to monitor and challenge bad behaviour of those in position of authority or power;*

»» *it is promoted as a means to help bringing people together for deliberation and debate;*

»» *it is promoted for enhancing competitive functioning of markets.*

5. When transparency disappoints

While an increase in transparency is typically seen as a desirable endeavour, hard evidence of the positive impacts of transparency in the fisheries sector is still limited. For example, the link between increased public access to information and substantial reductions in illegal fishing, is still mostly based on anecdotal evidence, albeit with some encouraging case studies.²⁷ One challenge of assessing the impact of how increased transparency can lead to, inter alia, governments or organisations become less corrupt, more democratic, is that these relationships are extremely difficult to measure, and they may take considerable time to occur.

However, it is also increasingly understood that how transparency is achieved is critical in determining whether it is impactful or not. There are several reasons why transparency can be disappointing:

When information is deceiving

There is a strong concern that transparency initiatives fall short due to the tendency for those in position of authority to manipulate information for their own ends. Transparency therefore slides into propaganda. Ivan Krastev writing for the Open Government Partnership put it succinctly: *“At the moment when government information is designed to be immediately open to everybody, its value as information stands in decline and its value as an instrument of manipulating the public increases.”*²⁸ This is why proactive transparency is generally considered quite weak in terms of addressing high level political corruption; information that comes from litigation or is leaked by whistleblowers tends to be far more incriminating. It is an important point to consider where calls for government disclosure of information is made to fight corruption or IUU fishing. The results might not be as positive as hoped for because those supplying the information may have vested interests in ensuring certain information is absent or untruthful. Several transparency initiatives address this dilemma by ensuring independent verification and cross checking of government or corporate information, which, as noted already, has been a key principle for the FiTI’s multi-stakeholder orientation.

When information is useless

Another disappointing finding of transparency initiatives is that even where a great deal of new information is made available—and at great cost—subsequent analysis finds that hardly anyone is using it, including those that were the intended beneficiaries. This may reflect that the demand for the data was not as much as the initially thought, or that

27 This is a subject that will be addressed in more detail in a further tBrief.

28 <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/trust/does-more-transparency-mean-more-trust/>



publicity about the data has not been effective. Another challenge is that in order to make sense of disclosed information may be extremely time consuming and complex. Lengthy documents and statistics are not very useful for many people, and unless a third party takes the time to trawl through the data and pull out useful information, the outcome of the transparency reform is fairly limited.

It has also been speculated that this problem of ‘useless’ information’ is not always accidental: organisations wanting to hide information about themselves do this by ‘data dumping’; providing an enormous amount of documents or statistics that they know is impossible, or highly unlikely, to be used or understood.

Again, transparency initiatives try to deal with these problems by ensuring what is being made transparent is driven by local demand and priorities, and that information is presented in ways that make it readily comprehensible and relevant.

Where information is not enough to achieve change

However, perhaps the most glaring challenge facing transparency lies with the assumption that people can use new information to change behaviours and decisions of those in power or authority. A great deal of evidence suggests this can and does happen, but equally numerous transparency reforms have led to quite limited achievements in terms of improved access to justice, or participation in decision making. As one scholar on the subject remarked; “if the power of transparency is based on the ‘power of shame’, then its influence over the really shameless could be quite limited.”

This observation draws the discussion on the value of transparency to an important juncture. **One of the more concrete findings of transparency initiatives has been that they depend to a great extent on the prevailing culture in government, and the existence of other political and civil rights, such as the right to be heard, to have access to justice and the right to participate in government decision making.** This is why the Aarhus Convention and the Escazu Convention are not focussed on public access to information in isolation, but also on participation and access to justice. If these other political and civil rights are not recognised and respected, then giving citizens more information might not achieve very much.

While this is uncontroversial to believe, a countervailing view is that even in the most undemocratic and authoritarian contexts, access to information can galvanise the ability of people to better demand their rights and freedoms.



29 <https://www.govtech.com/opinion/What-Can-Go-Wrong-with-Government-Transparency.html>

30 Fox, J. (2007). The Uncertain Relationship between Transparency and Accountability. *Development in Practice*, 17(4/5)



6. Concluding remarks

The concept of transparency is now widely accepted as being fundamental to sustainable and equitable fisheries management and the human rights-based approach; yet, the subject is not straightforward at all. There is an enormous and contested range of information that is being linked to improved transparency and the motivations evident in various initiatives are quite diverse and possibly conflicting; some may want to use transparency to challenge governments and companies over their failings, some want access to information to work with governments to address transnational corporate criminality, while others want transparency to facilitate deliberative democratic processes, and particularly for empowering the most marginalised and vulnerable. Others may see transparency as a business strategy or as a means of increasing competitive market dynamics. Whether transparency delivers what people hope it will depend to a large extent on how it is defined and how it is achieved. If poorly implemented, then transparency could have unintended negative consequences, benefiting some groups over others, or leading to confusion and misinformation. There is therefore a lot more to transparency in fisheries than simply publishing information.



Outlook

We hope you found this first edition of our tBrief interesting and stimulating. Our intention was to look quite broadly and address a number of basic questions and challenges when seeking to increase transparency in the fisheries sector. In the second edition we will look more closely at transparency in the governance of tenure in marine fisheries, including issues affecting coastal communities and small-scale fisheries.

