

Empowerment through information

ICSF's recent training programme sought to empower fishworker organizations through information and related resources

A total of 26 participants from six countries participated in *Empowerment through Information: ICSF's Training Programme for Fishworker Organizations and Non-governmental Organizations* (NGOs), held in Chennai and Trivandrum, India, between 18 and 28 August 2003. Twenty-four participants came from six countries in Asia, namely, Philippines, India, Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, while two were from South Africa. Participants included representatives of artisanal fishworker organizations and NGOs working with, and providing support to, artisanal fishing communities in their countries.

The programme sought to explore the potential relevance of international legal instruments and processes to field-level experiences and developments. The methodology used was to start off with a presentation by resource person/s for each session, to be followed by presentations by participants.

The following themes were discussed at the sessions: property rights and fisheries resources management; international legal instruments relevant to fisheries; rights and responsibilities of fishworkers in managing small-scale fisheries; coastal area management; labour; trade, environment and subsidies; women in fisheries; and information resources on fisheries, a hands-on session that exposed the participants to the basics of locating and accessing online resources as well as a tour of the ICSF Documentation Centre and its resources.

Two panel discussions dealt with international instruments for the management of small-scale fisheries and those relevant for coastal area management. A group discussion followed on the relevance of these

instruments to ground realities and the extent to which they were integrated into legislation at the national level.

At one post-dinner session, the film *Under the Sun: The Transient Fisherfolk of Jambudwip*, produced by ICSF and directed by Rita Banerji, was screened. The film documents the work and life of small-scale fishworkers using the island of Jambudwip in the Sunderbans mangrove forest in West Bengal, India, for drying fish. These fishworkers are now being threatened with eviction in the name of forest conservation. Another post-dinner session focused on fisheries trade and food security.

In general, the emphasis in all the sessions was to ensure that expertise available with participants was shared with the rest of the group. The methodology used was also a function of the diversity among participants. Several participants had difficulty following the English language. Use of audio-visual aids was encouraged, especially as it facilitated better understanding among participants who had some difficulty with English.

Preparatory material

Given that a major focus of the five-day training programme was on international legal instruments and processes of relevance to artisanal and small-scale fishworkers, as part of the preparatory material for the training programme, the ICSF Documentation Centre had compiled information on international instruments and institutions of relevance to fishworkers. A user-friendly interactive CD-ROM titled *International Instruments and Institutions Related to Fisheries* and a booklet titled *Handbook on International Legal Instruments Related to Fisheries* was prepared as a ready reckoner on these instruments and processes. A Flash

presentation based on the *UN Treaty Handbook* and included in the CD-ROM, was shown to participants.

The five-day training programme was followed by a four-day field visit to Trivandrum in Kerala. The visit was anchored by the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS) and included visits to village-level societies, boatbuilding yards, outboard motor repair units, ice factories and other activities of SIFFS. It also included a visit to the office of the Kerala Independent Fishworkers Federation, the National Fishworkers Forum (NFF) and the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP).

At the close of the training programme and field visit, a questionnaire was circulated to all participants, seeking their feedback. The feedback, in general, was positive. Several participants requested regular follow-up of the programme, and similar programmes to be organized at the national level. They also requested a revision of the handbook to include illustrations, as this would make it easier for fishworker organizations to use in their work. Several other suggestions were made. Some participants proposed that for future programmes, participants with comparable levels of experience should be invited, and that selection criteria should be clearly stated in the invitation. Some participants also felt that the programme was too dense. Another

suggestion was to circulate the programme and background information beforehand, so that participants could come prepared for the programme. For the field visit, several participants said that they would have liked to spend more time interacting with fishermen and fishing communities. 3

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