

Food for Thought

In the follow-up to the 4SSF Conference, fishworker organizations must capitalize on the positive experiences of social movements and civil society organizations (CSOs) engaged in the struggle for food sovereignty

The Global Conference on Small-scale Fisheries, “Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries: Bringing Together Responsible Fisheries and Social Development” (4SSF), held in Bangkok, Thailand, in October 2008, constituted the first opportunity for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to listen to, and take into account, the voices of many fisherfolk representatives from all over the world, as well as of the organizations working with them, and to understand their claims and demands related to the achievement of a true social development for the fisheries constituency.

about what small-scale fisheries means in varying geographical contexts.

A similar debate took place some years ago on how to better define what was understood by ‘family farm/small-scale/peasant agriculture’ (agricultura campesina in Spanish and agriculture paysanne in French).

Comparing different socioeconomic contexts, a poor small farmer can be either a wheat producer in Manitoba, Canada, with 300 ha of farmland, or a rice farmer in the Red River Valley, Vietnam, cultivating just 5,000 sq m in order to survive; both will have to employ their children and wives in the farm; none will be able to send their children to school/university; and none will have great control over their future.

The debts incurred by the Vietnamese farmer to buy a carabao buffalo will be equal to the debt the small Canadian farmer will have to incur to buy a tractor.

One of the emerging conclusions within the world of small-scale farmers is that there is no opposition between the farmers of the North and the South; rather, there does exist an opposition between an industrial model of agriculture, which is dominant in the North (but is also present in the South, as, for example, with the case of a Malaysian financier who bought 5,000 ha of land to cultivate rice) and the family farm/small-scale agricultural model of production, which was once the mainstay of lively rural communities, both in the North and the South.

In great crisis

These days, the family farm/small-scale agricultural model of production

One of the emerging conclusions within the world of small-scale farmers is that there is no opposition between the farmers of the North and the South.

At the same time, fisherfolk organizations took the Bangkok opportunity to collectively discuss these issues. The Constituent Assembly of the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers, held in Loctudy, France, in October 2000, was the last opportunity for many fisherfolk organizations to meet and exchange views. The international context has changed radically since then. As evident during informal conversations in the corridors of the Bangkok conference, a longer process is needed for proper discussion about the different social and economic conditions in each fishery context. Discussions among fisherfolk also revealed differences of perspective

*This piece is written by **Beatriz Gascó** (lo@foodsovereignty.org), in collaboration with **Antonio Onorati** and **Sofia Monsalve** of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) and FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN)*

is in great crisis, principally due to a lack of fair agricultural policies or, even more commonly, because agriculture and rural development are absolutely not priorities for government policy.

The other fact we have realized over these years of work is that none of the food producer constituencies will be able to confront their problems on their own. They represent the subaltern part of society and, therefore, they need to link up with others in the same situation to generate critical mass. The issue of food and agriculture cannot be separated into compartments: agriculture, fisheries, forests, natural resources management, and local and global markets are all interconnected. Therefore, whenever we think about an action or a platform for struggle, we must take into account this interrelation and view the different sectors

as a whole. This is probably one of the main reasons why the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) was born in 1996.

An important effort must be made to capitalize on the experience of the positive processes in which social movements and civil society organizations (CSOs) have been engaged in for years in the struggle for food sovereignty, in particular, the Voluntary Guidelines for the Implementation of the Right to Adequate Food and the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD).

The process that led to the adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization for the Right to Adequate Food is probably among the most successful in terms of the effective participation of CSOs in the definition of an international instrument that

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Farmers, indigenous peoples and workers' leaders at a march during the Forum for Food Sovereignty, held in Rome in June 2002. Food producer constituencies will not be able to confront their problems on their own

could lead to food sovereignty. In fact, the civil society Right to Food Working Group (RTF WG) had an important role in facilitating civil society intervention in the FAO Inter-governmental Working Group, set up by the World Food Summit: five years later (WFS: fyl), which elaborated and negotiated the Voluntary Guidelines text that was finally approved by the 127th Session of the FAO Council in November 2004. The RTF WG was initially set up in 2002 by FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN) International and several other CSOs from different continents. In 2003, it was formally defined as the RTF focal point of the IPC (IPC WG RTF). The RTF WG had also an important role in the negotiation of the first standard-setting instrument adopted by an intergovernmental group, which has already been adopted as an important instrument for the monitoring work of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESR).

From the point of view of CSOs, ICARRD represents a major contribution in form and substance to the debates and actions that need to be taken around agrarian reform and rural-development issues in the coming years.

While considering social development in small-scale fisheries from a human-rights perspective, it is essential that the human rights of fisher peoples are legally recognized, enforced and effectively implemented at the national level. These rights must include legally mandated rights to access fishery resources, to land, to food and housing, to gender equality and decent working conditions. For small-scale fisheries, social development should include the principle that fisher people also need non-discriminatory and sound economic policies that will permit fishers, particularly women, to earn a fair return from their labour, capital and management, and encourage conservation and sustainable management of natural resources.

Fisheries policies should strengthen local and national markets, and need to strike a balance between national policy spaces and international disciplines and commitments. Finally, also to be considered is the development of a human-rights-based monitoring of the social development of fisher peoples. Such monitoring aims at controlling governments' performance in the light of the contracted obligations in human-rights law. It goes beyond traditional monitoring exercises done by States through the statistical units within different ministries. The monitoring efforts *per se* belong to human-rights obligations. The Voluntary Guidelines on the Implementation of the Right to Food dedicate several parts to monitoring mechanisms as key components of a national strategy for the realization of the right to food, and provide practical guidance on how to set up, and develop, such monitoring instruments. The autonomous monitoring capacity of fisher peoples and their organizations should be strengthened so that we can make more effective use of recourse mechanisms and other legal provisions instrumental to defending our rights.

It would be instructive to recall the process towards ICARRD. Social movements and CSOs gathered around the food sovereignty approach always include fisheries whenever issues related to agrarian reform and access to natural resources are being considered. The Forum for Food Sovereignty, held in Rome in June 2002, stated, "Food sovereignty requires...access to land, water, forests, fishing areas and other productive resources through genuine redistribution, not by market forces and World Bank-sponsored, market-assisted land reforms" and "to achieve food sovereignty...we will struggle to realize genuine agrarian and fisheries reform, rangeland and forestry reform, and achieve comprehensive and integral redistribution of productive resources in favour of the poor and the landless".

International agenda

For its part, FAO, as a further step in putting land and rural-development issues as a top priority

on the international agenda, organized ICARRD, which was hosted by the government of Brazil in 2006. Paragraph 14 of the ICARRD final declaration, undersigned by 92 governments, states: "We recognize that policies and practices for broadening and securing sustainable and equitable access to, and control over, land and related resources and the provision of rural services should be examined and revised in a manner that fully respects the rights and aspirations of rural people, women and vulnerable groups, including forest, fishery, indigenous and traditional rural communities, enabling them to protect their rights, in accordance with national legal frameworks."

From the point of view of CSOs, ICARRD represents a major contribution in form and substance to the debates and actions that need to be taken around agrarian reform and rural-development issues in the coming years. ICARRD has been unique in allowing rural social movements (of farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, landless and agricultural workers and producers) and other CSOs to participate in the process, on equal footing with their governments, and in a manner that is respectful of the autonomy of CSOs. Rural social movements and other CSOs have been referring to ICARRD as a good practice to organize civil society participation in international conferences. The challenge now is to bring together civil society efforts with supportive initiatives that sympathetic governments and FAO and IFAD might further launch to fulfill ICARRD commitments. Resistance to implement ICARRD is still very strong, even more in the current context of aggressive agrofuel expansion.

Recently, FAO's Land Tenure Unit approached the IPC to start discussing the process of adopting voluntary guidelines on land and natural-resources tenure. Given the fact that secure rights of access for the poor and vulnerable are increasingly affected by climate change, violent conflicts and natural disasters, population growth and urbanization, and demands for new energy sources such as bio-energy, FAO,



A scene from San Antonio fish market, Chile. Fisheries policies should help fishers, especially women, earn a fair return from their labour

IPC and other interested organizations feel that there is a need for such guidelines. Yet more work is required to define their exact scope and framework. Following the positive examples of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food and the ICARRD process in terms of effective participation of social movements and other CSOs, FAO agreed to apply a similar methodology, which is already reflected in the tentative plan of work. The IPC greatly welcomes this, and will engage in the process, with the participation of fisher organizations and farmers and indigenous peoples.

The IPC is of the opinion that this initiative could become highly relevant in the current context of the food crisis. In fact, the issue of access to, and control over, land, sea and natural resources by marginalized rural groups has been neglected in the analysis of the current food crisis and in the policy proposals made by the UN High-level Task Force on the Global Food Crises. On the other hand, the IPC considers that it is absolutely crucial for FAO to apply a human-rights-based approach—for example, using the instruments like the Voluntary Guidelines for the Implementation of the Right to Adequate Food—not only in its work on access to land and natural resources for food production but also as part of its strategic framework for larger action.

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For more



www.foodsovereignty.org/new/
**International NGO/CSO Planning
 Committee for Food Sovereignty
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www.icarrd.org/sito.html
**International Conference on
 Agrarian Reform and Rural
 Development**

www.fao.org/righttofood/
Right to Food Unit, FAO