

# GLOBAL FISHERIES TRENDS AND THE FUTURE OF FISHWORKERS

Final statement of the Bangkok Conference (Thailand, January 22-27, 1990)

*Before finalising the Conference, a general declaration on the global fisheries trends and the future of fishworkers was adopted by the participants. We publish here below some of the main points. The complete text of the declaration can be obtained at the liaison office in Brussels.*

The Conference met at a juncture when the trends in the fisheries sector point to the imminent likelihood of major changes at the international level. These emerging changes arise not only from within the fisheries sector, but are also precipitated by pressures of ongoing development processes in the sectors of the economy. The cumulated effects of these changes, in the long-run, threatens to destroy irreparably the aquatic cycle which is the basis of life on our planet (...)

## Global trends

During the last three decades there has been a steady increase in the world demand for fish. This tendency is predicted to continue and even to accelerate during the coming decades. Consequently, there has been tremendous effort to expand the production of fish to match this rising demand. This effort has taken place at a time when most maritime countries extended their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).(...)

As a result of the new Law of the Sea signed in 1982, industrialised countries have been increasingly concerned with maintaining access of their long distance fleets to the water off the coast of developing countries as well as with ensuring a steady supply of fishery products from the Third World. The latter was often achieved by enhancing the productive potential of the local fisheries through the provision of international finance, both public and private.

This development was particularly visible in the field of shrimp aquaculture in developing countries and in the rapid increase of fishing agreements between Northern and Southern countries-especially between the European Economic Community and the African countries.

Along side these efforts to enhance fish production, there are increasing threats to the aquatic eco-system due to the developments which have occurred in the other sectors of the economy. Indiscriminate economic growth strategies have resulted in excessive pressure on natural resources, particularly in coastal region, and in growing amounts of effluents from industries and modern agriculture which affect

the biological productivity of rivers, estuaries and coastal seas. The anarchic development of tourism along coastal areas provides striking illustration of the detrimental effect which such profit-oriented strategies have on fisherfolk and fisheries.

These trends have accentuated in the 1980's because of the external debt problem of many developing countries. Indeed, the need to service their debts in the context of a world economic crisis has forced them to plunder their natural resources and to neglect the basic need of large segments of their people in order to earn foreign exchange quickly.

## Issues in fisheries management and development

In the fisheries sector, export-oriented strategies as well as the provision of access rights to industrial fishing fleets, have resulted in enhanced competition and conflicts with local fisheries, particularly with small-scale fishing communities.

These small-scale fishing communities form a particularly vulnerable segment of the fisheries sector due to a variety of reasons. They are by and large powerless against physical intrusions in waters over which they had traditional rights. Poor access to credit, modern inputs and know-how have prevented them from upgrading their fishing technologies. The political and social marginalisation continue to reinforce all the above vulnerabilities.

In the case of some countries, the small-scale fishing communities have been able to get their governments to reorient fisheries policies. In other cases, they have succeeded in modernising their artisanal technologies which has enhanced their ability to compete with industrial fleets.

Unfortunately, this latter modernisation process in many countries has been only a short-term solution to the problems of these communities. This is so because fishery resources are already fully or even over-exploited when these measures are adopted.(...) Fishworkers from developing countries working on the industrial fishing fleets are also victims of exploitation.(...) Their work and service con-

ditions are abysmally poor and they are faced with the constant threat of dismissal.(...)

### **Fishworker's organisations**

Collective action of fishworkers is necessary for monitoring fishing effort, controlling access to the sea and managing and rejuvenating the resources. It is also a prerequisite for performing a large variety of economic, social and political functions. These include cooperative organisation for purchase of input and sale of outputs; improving access to credit and insurance; developing appropriate technologies and related skills; and for health and educational measures.(...)

A new genre of fishworkers' organisations have emerged during the last decade in some countries (e.g. India, Philippines, Chile). These organisations have focused their attention on, and directed their struggle at, ensuring that the state take steps to ensure that appropriate fishery management measures are enacted and enforced.

However, it must be admitted that in many instances the same organisations are much weaker in their ability to cope with the self-defeating character of certain fishing methods and the anarchic increases in fishing capacity aimed initially at maintaining their incomes.

Therefore a processor education and awareness-building is a basic prerequisite for these fishermen and their new organisations. Equally important in this context is the need to revive and reinstate the encyclopedic knowledge which many of these communities possess about the aquatic-system, this cultural knowledge should serve as an important basis for devising ways and means of controlling and re-orienting fishing effort and rejuvenating fishery resources.(...)

Attempts by fishworkers to federate at the national level should be actively promoted. However, where such national federations are multi-sectoral, the small-scale fishworkers are likely to be marginalised within the larger structures. Such inter-sectoral problems should be openly discussed.

### **Aquaculture**

In Latin America and Asia, coastal aquaculture has witnessed a phenomenal growth during the last decade.

Export-oriented aquaculture, it now appears, has created severe problems which jeopardies the livelihood of local peasant and fishing communities and in the long term will affect the sustainability of the natural resource base.(...)

In the case of shrimp aquaculture in tropical countries we see the destruction of large tracts of estuarine and mangrove areas which form the natural breeding grounds of many species of aquatic life. Often, shrimp aquaculture is undertaken at the expense of staple foods such as rice and fish species which were formally locally consumed. After a few years of continuous cultivation, the fields are polluted owing to the accumulation of toxic organic and inorganic substances. Since much of the demand for shrimp comes from a handful of industrialised countries the increase in shrimp production on a global scale causes a fall in the world market prices. This quickly affects not only those involved in aquaculture but is also bound to affect negatively the incomes of all small-scale fishworkers involved in capture-shrimp fisheries in developing countries.

However less intensive forms of aquaculture development can provide opportunities for fishworkers communities to manage fish resources in the areas where they live to obtain new sources of income and to enhance food production and employment. This requires that such communities are given exclusive rights to control the water bodies and the surrounding environment.

### **Perspectives for the future**

- To face the future, it is imperative to emphasise the need for more holistic understanding of the intricate relationship between the aquatic environment and the total biosphere of our planet. As beacons of the sea fishworkers have a special role and responsibility in furthering this understanding.
- To achieve this holistic understanding there is an increasing need for fishworkers and their supporters to relate more closely to other deprived people whose survival is also affected by environmental damage, which as in the case of fisheries, is hastened by development processes that pay little heed to the rhythms of nature.
- These new alliances to protect the environment should not detract fishworkers either from the demands within the fisheries sector or from the autonomous functioning of their organisations.
- Sustainability of development requires that we move from exploitative to nurturing relationships with nature. Nurture and sustenance have always been the role of women in fishing communities. This role has often resulted in them being marginalised in their own communities. Only their active participation in the economy and a recognition of its centrality, will ensure that such new relationships with nature emerge.