

Fishing for insights

A recent international workshop at Ceará, Brazil identified emerging issues of concern for small-scale fishing communities

The year 2006 marks the 20th anniversary of the founding of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), in India in 1986. In the two decades of ICSF's existence, the fishing sector, in general, and the small-scale fisheries-dependent communities, in particular, have been profoundly affected by many changes. At the same time, the small-scale sector itself has changed in many ways. It, therefore, appeared important and timely to organize an international workshop to take stock of significant developments in fisheries, and to identify emerging issues of concern.

It was against this background that the workshop on "Emerging Concerns of Fishing Communities: Issues of Labour, Trade, Gender, Disaster Preparedness, Biodiversity and Responsible Fisheries", was held from 4 to 6 July 2006 at SESC Colonia Ecologica in Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil. (Ceará is home to an important artisanal fishery that has a long history of struggle against destructive fishing practices and inequitable policies.) The workshop, co-hosted with Instituto Terramar, was organized with the following objectives:

- Provide a forum for ICSF Members, fishworkers and others working in small-scale fisheries to share perspectives, and discuss and analyze recent developments of relevance to small-scale fisheries and fishing communities
- Explore possible future scenarios, and highlight actions needed to ensure a secure future for small-scale fishing communities
- Make recommendations, and otherwise enable the ICSF General

Body (GB) to draw on these discussions to set the agenda for the coming period

Sixty participants from 18 countries of Latin America, Asia, Africa and Europe participated in the workshop. They included, besides ICSF Members, representatives of fishworker organizations (FOS) and organizations working to support small-scale fisheries in their respective countries.

At the opening session, ICSF Members from Brazil, Maria Cristina Maneschy of the University of Belem and René Schärer of Instituto Terramar, welcomed all participants. The ICSF Secretariat then provided a brief overview of ICSF's work over the last 20 years. This was followed by a session where seven founding Members of ICSF present at the workshop, reflected on the 20 years of ICSF, from different perspectives. Setting the tone for the workshop to follow, Nalini Nayak, ICSF Member from India, drew attention to the changed context today. "I am rather confused who the small-scale sector includes and what it represents. This is one of the challenges for us to redefine, with our fishworker friends, who we are going to support and for what in the coming years" she wondered.

First session

The first session on "Responsible Fisheries" started with a panel discussion on "Fisheries Management: Rights-based Fisheries and Implications for the Small-scale Sector". Sebastian Mathew of ICSF said it is important to consider whether property-rights-based fisheries are capable of meeting the objectives of fisheries management, such as conservation of fisheries resources. More fundamentally, he wondered whether property rights limited to a few would be

acceptable in countries with large fishing populations.

Rolf Willmann, Senior Fishery Planning Officer, Fisheries Department of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), highlighted that rights are essential for effective fisheries management, and that decentralized and flexible community-rights-based systems need to be explored. Dao Gaye of Collectif National des Pecheurs Artisanaux du Senegal (CNPS) drew attention to present efforts in Senegal to regulate access by introducing access rights. John Kurien, Professor at the Centre for Development Studies, India, stressed the importance of institutional arrangements that go along with the granting of rights. Antonio Carlos Diegues, Professor at the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, made reference to traditional community-based systems that promoted sustainable utilization of resources. The conservation agenda is, unfortunately, now being defined by the North, he said.

In her presentation on co-management, Nalini Nayak, an ICSF Member, pointed out that the responsibilities and costs of management initiatives are often largely borne by communities, and particularly by the women of these communities. In such a context, it is important to define 'stakeholders' and ensure that their interests are protected and their efforts rewarded. Cosme Caracciolo of Confederación Nacional de Pescadores Artesanales de Chile (CONAPACH) said that the introduction of individual transferable quotas (ITQs) has led to the privatization of fish resources in Chile. There is also clear evidence of stock depletion, he said, questioning the very rationale of the ITQ system. Ramon Agama Salas of Federación de Integración y Unificación de los Pescadores Artesanales del Perú (FIUPAP), Peru, underscored the importance of effectively enforcing the artisanal zone to protect livelihoods in the small-scale sector and the resource base. The group discussions that followed the presentations concluded that it is important to improve management of fisheries resources, using measures that promote equity and sustainability.

The panel discussion on "Distant-water Fisheries: Implications for Fishing Communities" had representatives from Senegal, Guinea Conakry, Argentina, Chile and France. Dao Gaye from Senegal spoke about the participation of the artisanal sector during negotiations of fisheries access agreements with the European Union (EU), and said that on no account should foreign fishing fleets be allowed access to resources exploited by the artisanal sector. Governments need to address the social problems resulting from migration of fishers from neighbouring countries and poor people from rural areas, before thinking of fishing agreements with foreign distant-water countries, he said. He also drew attention to the problem posed by illegal fishing operations by foreign fleets.

Ernesto Godelmann of el Centro para el Desarrollo y la Pesca Sustentable (CeDePesca, the Centre for Sustainable Fisheries Development), Argentina, drew attention to the overexploitation of resources in Argentine waters, which resulted from fishing operations of European fleets fishing under access agreements. He further highlighted the poor labour conditions on board these vessels, and the gross violations of human rights. The issue of exploitative labour conditions on illegal fleets fishing in international waters off the southern coast of Latin America was also mentioned by Hector Luis Morales of the University of La Serena, Chile. Juan Carlos Cardenas of Centro Ecoceanos, Chile, flagged the issue of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in international waters, and stressed the need to create the necessary political will to regulate the activities of such fleets. James Smith of the Observatory of Seafarers' Rights, France, provided information on cases of abandonment of crew of fishing vessels, and highlighted the need for greater international attention to this issue.

FAO guidelines

The presentation by Rolf Willmann of the FAO, on "Policies and Strategies for Increasing the Contribution of Small-scale Fisheries to Poverty Alleviation and Food Security" was based on the FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries on Increasing the Contribution of Small-scale Fisheries to Poverty Alleviation and Food

Security. Willmann drew attention to the renewed global recognition of small-scale fisheries, and outlined possible pro-poor policy, legislation and management approaches. He highlighted the importance of providing greater rights and access to fisheries resources, to reduce overcapacity in industrial fisheries and to establish effective co-management and community-based management regimes.

In the session on “Biodiversity and the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries”, Chandrika Sharma and Ramya Rajagopalan of ICSF discussed, in particular, the implications of the Protected Area Programme of Work of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) for fishing communities. Even as there is international pressure to expand the area under marine protected areas (MPAs), non-participatory and top-down implementation is affecting communities in a highly negative way, they said. At the same time, MPAs may not be the best approach for conserving marine biodiversity or fisheries resources under all circumstances, as is being presently proposed, they observed. Antonio Carlos Diegues provided information about marine extractive reserves (RESEX) in Brazil, as an alternative approach to participatory conservation. This approach, particularly effective for sedentary species, reaffirms the rights of artisanal fishing communities to the sea. This is also a model in which the relationship between traditional knowledge and resources are taken into consideration for resource conservation, he said. Sebastian Mathew, speaking on the current initiatives to develop an ecosystem approach to fisheries, said that the concept could potentially be useful to draw greater attention to destructive gear, such as bottom trawling, as well as to address the impact on fisheries resources of pollution from land-based and other sources.

During the session on “Trade in Fish and Fish Products”, Sebastian Mathew focused on the implications of processes under way in the World Trade Organization (WTO) for small-scale fisheries. He drew attention, in particular, to negotiations on eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers, and on clarifying and improving WTO disciplines on fisheries

subsidies. Further, there is a possibility, he said, that, by disciplining production-distorting subsidies in fisheries, WTO’s mandate could broaden to include fishing methods (and not only fish and fish products), with several implications, including the likelihood of linking with multilateral environmental agreements.

Speaking on fish trade and food security, John Kurien observed that the relationship between fish trade and food security is complex and not necessarily positive. He noted that the goal should be to enhance the positive contribution of fish trade to both direct and indirect food security, and to make it more inclusive, and that only truly responsible fisheries initiatives can achieve this goal.

Alain le Sann of Peche et Developpement, France, shared the reactions, in France, to *Darwin’s Nightmare*, a film on the political and social impact of the Nile perch fishery in Lake Victoria. The film, he said, was effective in drawing attention to the ethics involved in the trade of Nile perch from Lake Victoria, and has generated debate on the course of action that needs to be pursued, such as consumer boycotts. He emphasized the need for a nuanced response that supported the organizational actions of fishworkers and their communities in Africa, and emphasized responsible consumption.

Ernesto Godelmann and René Schärer spoke of the problems and prospects of ecolabels for small-scale fisheries, and the role that ecolabels can play in promoting selective fishing and thereby, sustainable management of fisheries resources. It is necessary to create stronger alliances with consumers in the countries of market destination, in the context of consumer boycotts, public awareness campaigns, and ecolabelling and fair trade, they said. Measures to promote resource sustainability and ecosystem integrity as well as equity and food security are as essential, they added.

MSC certification

The discussion that followed emphasized the need to explore the implications of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification of fisheries that are primarily harvested by industrial vessels, for

small-scale fisheries, as, for example, on the small-scale fisheries for hake in Chile. It was also pointed out that a certification of industrial fisheries as sustainable was in itself problematic from a small-scale-fisheries perspective. This was specially so as the certification process did not take into account gear-related social and labour issues.

Another issue discussed was the relationship between population growth, particularly in developing countries, and the demand for fish, and overfishing. Increase in population does not directly translate into a greater demand for fish and higher pressure on resources, as demand is linked to purchasing power, argued John Kurien.

In the panel discussion on “Disaster Preparedness and Coastal Fishing Communities”, panelists shared their priorities in relation to disaster preparedness, based on their experiences with natural disasters affecting fishing communities, such as cyclones, the El Niño, and the 26 December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Panelists included Ravadee Prasertcharoensuk of the Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF), Thailand; Herman Kumara of National Fisheries Solidarity (NAFSO), Sri Lanka; Harekrishna Debnath of National Fishworkers’ Forum (NFF), India; Juan Carlos Sueiro of Cooperacion, Peru;

Gunnar Album of Coastal Campaign, Norway; and Cornelie Quist of VinVis, Netherlands. All the presentations highlighted the importance of strong community organizations in a disaster context. The need for good co-ordination, handled by a set of people with experience in disaster management, was also highlighted, as was the need to integrate disaster preparedness into local development plans, prepared in participatory ways. The Thai presentation highlighted efforts to integrate disaster preparedness into school curricula. It was suggested that it is important for organizations such as the FAO to have in place a team of people experienced in disaster co-ordination, deployable at short notice. In the session on “Labour Issues in Fisheries”, Sebastian Mathew provided information on the ongoing International Labour Organization (ILO) process related to the proposed Convention on Comprehensive Standard on Work in the Fishing Sector, which could not be adopted at the 93rd session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in 2005 for lack of quorum.

Convention relevant

He drew attention to the importance of ensuring that the Convention is adopted when it comes up again for voting in 2007, as its adoption could benefit the small-scale sector in several ways. The Convention is also relevant in a context where employer-employee relations in

the small-scale sector, as well as employment of wage labour, are on the rise. The Convention does not at present cover shore-based women workers, and it is important to work toward their inclusion, he said.

David Eli of Technical Services for Community Development (TESCOD), Ghana, presented a film being made on child labour in the fisheries of Lake Volta in Ghana. While it is a traditional practice in Ghana for children to be handed over to relatives or friends to develop their skills, factors such as changes in the local economy and a rise in HIV/AIDS have given a new face to child labour in Africa, in general, and Ghana, in particular. The working conditions now are close to slavery. Though Ghana has elaborate laws and programmes to eradicate the worst forms of child labour, the lack of enforcement is the biggest hurdle. An important issue raised in David Eli's presentation was the distinction between paid labour and family labour with similar conditions. He spoke about the need for a nuanced understanding of child labour. If children are denied their right to education and fulfilment of their aspirations, this can be considered as child labour, even if children live at home and work to contribute to the household economy.

There were four presentations in the session on "Aquaculture". The first presentation by Rolf Willmann drew attention to the rapid growth in aquaculture in the recent past. Cultured fish accounts for almost 50 per cent of food fish supply today. Even as production increases, there is growing trend towards intensification of aquaculture practices, and an increasing influence of markets, trade and consumers on production, he said. The presentations from Chile by Juan Carlos Cardenas and from Brazil, by Soraya Vanini of Instituto Terramar and a member of Red Manglar, drew attention to the social and environmental costs of export-oriented salmon and shrimp farming, respectively. Particular attention was drawn to the expansion of the fishmeal industry to support the increase in production of high-value carnivorous species, and the links of reduction fisheries with environmental degradation. The need to prevent the

introduction of genetically modified organisms for aquaculture was also underlined. The presentation from Thailand highlighted the emerging problem of privatization of inshore areas (commons) for mariculture, through the Seafood Bank project being promoted by the Thai government. This could lead to growing conflicts in coastal areas, said Ravadee Prasertcharoensuk.

In the final session on "Fishworker Organizations: Emerging Concerns" there were ten presentations from fishworker organizations, NGOs and others working to support the small-scale sector. The session was meant to highlight issues that would need to be addressed in the coming period, to defend the interests of fishworkers and their communities. The concerns identified related to fisheries management, access to land and sea resources, labour and social security, trade, aquaculture and related issues, such as recognizing and supporting women's roles in fisheries and in organizations. The presentation by Cornelia Quist provided an incisive account of the achievements and challenges facing fisherwomen's movements in Europe.

Although its agenda was packed, the workshop witnessed some very interesting and thought-provoking discussions on a wide range of issues of concern to men, women and children of fishing communities. It also witnessed excellent participation from fishworker organizations, NGOs, academics and others. Especially noteworthy was the great participation of local groups and communities from Ceará. The women's meeting, on the sidelines of the workshop, provided good insights into how women of fishing communities in Brazil and Chile are organizing around their concerns. ♣

This report has been filed by Neena Koshy and Chandrika Sharma (icsf@icsf.net) of ICSF. The full report of the workshop and the presentations can be accessed from the conference webpage on the ICSF website (<http://www.icsf.net/jsp/conference/GB2006/>)