

THE WAY FROM INTERDEPENDENCE TOWARDS SOLIDARITY

We live in an increasingly interdependent world. Trade, aid agreements, capital flows and migration of people between countries and from continent to continent, between North and South, are becoming more and more intensive.

The fishery sector is particularly subject to such growing interdependence. In order to make up for the depletion of certain fish stocks in northern waters, industrial fleets are looking more and more to harvest the richer fishing grounds belonging to tropical countries. They sign lucrative contracts with their governments, which enable them to supply the markets of Europe, the USA or Japan with high quality products at relatively low cost. In return, the countries that own the fishery resources receive financial compensation and technical aid or training. However, it must be said that this counterpart is usually neither a fair deal nor in keeping with the receiving country's needs.

A similar trend in interdependence is to be found in the development of intensive aquaculture in numerous Third World countries. To satisfy the wealthy nations' demand for high-value species, many thousands of hectares of land are being converted into ponds for raising shrimp, mainly for export. The monoculture of shellfish is not unlike that of cotton, soyabean or cassava, in that it takes place on land, which had hitherto been used for growing food crops, or in mangrove swamps, which are natural nursery areas for fish and crustaceans.

Of course, this type of aquaculture brings in the hard currency, which developing countries inevitably need in order to import capital goods. But here too, interdependence may carry risks for the ecological systems and populations of these countries: the destruction of ecosystems, pollution, the disappearance of certain fish species, reduced food self-sufficiency, the forced displacement of people...

Many other examples could clearly show how the increase in North-South interdependence, in the area of fishery economics, has unfortunately not been built on equitable grounds, and often leaves poorer countries on the losing end.

It is urgent that such policies and economic practices be denounced by demonstrating which interests are being served by the present trends in the fishery sector. Interdependence as such is not a bad thing insofar as it engenders new relations between different people and nations, between North and South; however, it can only augur well for the future if it is based on a just and genuine partnership. In other words, an interdependent relationship needs to be founded in solidarity.

Sheer utopia, some will say! I would not be so sure. Mutual interest can lead to changes in attitude and behaviour. The future of the industrial countries is closely tied to that of developing countries. The North will surely reap the harmful consequences of its present unequal trading system with the South, if it is maintained much longer.

An alternative policy does exist. It implies that all types of dependence and inequality should be resisted. The aim should be to put the relationship between people on a new footing. A number of fishworkers organizations have chosen to follow this road. With the prospect of finding their way from interdependence towards solidarity.

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