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GLOBALISATION AND THE CREATION OF A NEW
RESOURCE BASED SMALL-SCALE FISHING COMMUNITY

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INTRODUCTION

The mantra of globalisation -- the glories of the free market, modern technology and export-orientation -- are being held out today as the *sine qua non* for the prosperity of the economy and in turn the well-being of the people.

If indeed this triumvirate did function to yield these stated results, then it would be the small-scale fishing communities of the world that should have become prosperous. This is due to the simple reason that the three tenets of the globalisation mantra have been in uninhibited operation for well over many decades in this small sector of the economy in most of our countries.

The facts of the case are however rather different. We know that in many maritime countries, particularly in the developing world, fishing communities are "outliers" of the mainstream development process, marked by low incomes, poor health and illiteracy. The resources on which they depend for a livelihood are also in various states of depletion. The new euphoria of globalisation, with its emphasis on easy movement of industrial capital, mass production, large-scale international trade, standardisation of technology and knowledge, will therefore only turn out to be a greater hoax if we accept it uncritically.

Why was modern fisheries development initially divorced from fishworkers development? Why has fisheries development led to the ruin of the fishery resources? What then are the options which confront fishing communities? Are there alternative paths of development and management which they can follow in this era of globalisation?

Let us examine these issues.

DIVORCING THE COMMUNITY FROM THE RESOURCE AND RUINING BOTH

It has been to a great extent the ecological diversity of the marine resource in the form of thousands of species of fish, each available during a specific season along a particular coastal tract, which has in turn shaped the diverse technological, demographical and social conditions of fishing communities. It was this material basis which prevented the formation of a single maritime fishing tradition in most countries despite centuries of existence of vibrant fishing communities. Each community was largely restricted to a specific location except during the occasional migration in pursuit of a specie of fish. Consequently, detailed location specific knowledge evolved as a consequence of their process of labouring with nature. This produced an understanding of both the nuances of the marine eco-system and the living resources within it. The tools of the fish harvester -- the crafts, the variety of nets, traps and other entangling devices -- were perfected over time in this labour process. Each one was suited for a specific use. They were small in size, delicate in use and designed to be operated during specific seasons resulting in small harvests of fish. What these tools lacked in output efficiency was compensated for by their ecological sophistication.

The spring board for any new initiatives and interventions, what we have come to call "modern development", should have been based on the diversity of the specific "initial conditions" of the numerous fishing communities in our

countries. This was not appreciated by our planners, policy makers, scientists and technocrats as a proper basis on which to begin modern development in fisheries. They generally considered fishing communities to be ignorant, unscientific, conservative, pessimistic and slow to learn. This is one of those myths that has attained great currency as a result of value judgements made by persons holding the helm of affairs.

Having created this official myth, a new, modern paradigm around which fisheries could be developed was propounded. This normally had three pillars: firstly, the institutionalisation of the knowledge of the fishery resources by the induction of a single scientific tradition; secondly, introduction of efficient, standardised modern technology utilised in the temperate water ecosystems; and thirdly, the creation of a fishery bureaucracy. Such an approach cut at the very roots of the autonomy as well as the socio-cultural and technical diversity of these communities.

The institutionalised knowledge was highly reductionist in nature. It viewed the sea as a vast aquatic milieu made up of a configuration of different physical parameters and variety of flora and fauna each of which needed to be studied separately and in great detail. It took little account of the tendency towards instability within the ocean environment. As a consequence, the appreciation for the interrelations within the system as a whole, as well as the nuances of the specific locales within, was lost.

The standardised technology, particularly that part of it which stressed uniform technology for harvesting, can be said to lie at the root of the ecological crisis at sea. Basically it was ecologically inappropriate to the diversity of the tropical marine ecosystem. It initially contributed to a immediate increase in the throughput of specific forms of resource from the sea but this could not be sustained for long. The socio-economic force which was driving the spread of such artefacts was the urge to make quick profits from the resources of the sea. The nebulous structure of property rights over the sea made the spread of these artefacts even quicker. Add to this the fact that the actual degradation was not physically visible to either fishworkers or policy makers. This ensured that the resource could be brought to ruin with greater ease, the fact of the matter also remaining hidden for long.

The ruin of the resource is an issue over which there has been conflict between the knowledge systems of the fish harvesters and the modern fishery scientific establishment. In country after country we are beginning to realise the folly of this divorce of knowledge systems. We have ruined our fisheries due to the unquestioned faith in reductionist science to the total neglect of more holistic ecological knowledge acquired in the labour process. Their marriage could have saved the ecosystem and the resource.

The latter was hardly possible because the bureaucracy (scientists, technologists and officials) with some marked exceptions, had little direct contact with the working community. It was content to deal with the middlemen and traders who claimed to speak on behalf of the fishworkers. The interests of the former, in fish as a commodity, came to be closely akin to the main objective (often by default) of fisheries development in most developing countries — foreign exchange earnings. Where there was "success" in this approach it led to a masculinization of the control over most of the productive processes. Where there was "failure" it brought with it a feminisation of poverty in the sector. The divorce of fisheries development from fishworkers development was thus complete.

OPTIONS FOR CREATING AND SUSTAINING A RESOURCE BASED COMMUNITY

The context of most fish economies in developing countries is closely akin to what we have described with the variations attributable to the specificities of local realities. The push for a greater globalisation must be seen in this context. In particular we need to reckon with four tendencies which are strongly emerging in the fisheries sector. Firstly, there is the greater penetration of industrial capital directly and indirectly into the coastal inshore fisheries and into aquaculture. Secondly, the attempt to usurp the control of local communities of the local resources and bestow the same with institutions created from above — a case of robbing the commons from the commoner. Thirdly, there is the internationalisation of the fish market totally outside the control of the fish producers themselves. Fourthly there is constant upgradation of technology which is portrayed as the solution to delaying the economic consequences of declining resources. There is no reason to believe that the results will be any better for the community or the resource in the future.

To move into a future which will ensure greater justice, participation and self-reliance for these communities, we need to first delve back into the past. Not to glorify it but to search for the material basis which provided these communities with that essential "connectedness" to the resource. This provides the base for sustainable development of both the resource and the community which depends on it. We need to also examine the opportunities of the present in order to examine how best they can be utilised to achieve greater empowerment of these communities if they are to embark on a new voyage which promises a sustainable resource base within the control of the community, prospects of a decent livelihood and through this a contribution to food security and overall wealth creation for larger societal good.

Beacons of the Sea

One of the most basic requirements for moving towards the creation of a new resource based community is to recognise the role of fishworkers, especially those involved in harvesting, as the beacons of the sea. Their "connectedness" to the natural resource provides the basis for comprehending its intricacies derived from knowledge of the more stable, long-term relationships within local ecological systems. Paramount to this is their experiential perceptions of Nature as unpredictable but tending to an equilibrium within certain limits. They are thus usually the first to be able to observe the totality of the changes that occur in their immediate fluid environment, the implications of which they can assess and alert us about the impending danger to the sanctity of the system.

The attempt is not to romanticise any special relationship between resource and community. It is only the call to give more weightage to the role of those who labour in assessing the state of the resource on which their livelihood depends.

Knowledge Systems for Nurturing Nature

Fishing communities see themselves as children of the sea. Central to their collective perception of "connectedness" is the tenet that their future is inextricably linked to the state of the marine ecoweb. Respecting "mother sea" is therefore an innate natural duty and not an exoteric complusion. Growing out of this relationship is an encyclopaedic, holistic, vernacular

knowledge of specific locational marine ecowebs acquired by learning-through-labour. The future for harvesting the living resources of the sea for the benefit of the community and the world at large will depend importantly on this knowledge. Such micro-knowledge of "real fish" needs to be meshed with the global-imagery of "paper fish" in the form of computer printouts from remote sensing to provide a new basis for nurturing nature. It gives rise to the possibility of a micro-global linkage for marine resource development and management. On the one hand this is nuanced by an intricate and practical knowledge of the local and specific ecowebs but yet situated in the context of an understanding of the larger "seacosystem" as a whole. These new potentials for managing the marine resource, which arises from the co-evolutionary development potential of two knowledge systems, are indeed immense.

Aquarian Reforms for Creating Community

The modern development processes have disrupted the sense of community prevalent in most fishing villages. Traditional community institutions, where they have existed, were ignored by the fishery bureaucracy in its eagerness to introduce new institutions like cooperatives and welfare societies. These modern institutions were usurped by fish traders and merchants who always spoke on behalf of the fishing communities but were normally from outside their social and cultural milieu. The economic inequalities created as a result of the functioning of these institutions -- primarily by the introduction of modern technology and provision of institutional credit -- ruptured the social-cultural fabric in most fishing communities which was held together by customary law and oral traditions.

To revive a new sense of community, such that those with a "connectedness" to the marine resource are at its centre, will require an aquarian reform package. This must ensure that only those who actually fish get to have ownership of fishing assets. There must be a limit on the numbers. Such a community of owner-workers and workers must form the core of the new marine resource community with both the rights of access to the resource, a concrete say in the first sale price and responsibilities for sustainable management of the resource. This is one important way to address the crisis of identity and confidence which has beset many small-scale fishing communities world over following the failure of modern development processes.

Technology Appropriate to the Seacosystem

The assurance of such community-rights over the marine resource provides a certain assurance of stability and a confidence of tenure in an ethos of unpredictability. This then becomes the prime incentive for using technologies for harvesting which are environmentally benign and appropriate to the seacosystem. The compulsions for short-run resource extraction is thus greatly reduced. The hallmark of such technologies was described above. The challenge of the moment is to revive some of these technologies taking the benefit of new materials for fabrication and yet retaining the diversity of design and decentralised spatial organisation of production. This approach not only ensures artefacts which are ecologically benign but also socio-economically appropriate and financially appropriate.

Co-management, Property Rights and Local Institutions

These new, dispersed coastal communities with community property-rights over the marine resource should emerge as its most concerned stewards, particularly in the most productive near-shore coastal areas. But since the resources of the marine Exclusive Economic Zone as a whole are part of national territory it is the state that is bestowed with the role of overall custodianship. Ideally therefore it is the balanced co-management of coastal marine resource by state and community which will ensure participatory and sustainable use of these resources for maximum benefit to society as a whole at the least cost.

In this context the village level institutions provide the appropriate jurisdictions for creating a network of coastal marine resource rejuvenation and management councils. The appropriate adjustments may have to be made to ensure that these administrative boundaries overlap with certain natural coastal marine ecosystem boundaries long acknowledged and recognised by fishing communities.

These arrangements will go a long way to address the growing threat of privatisation of the coastal waters through the introduction of ITQs. They provide instead the opportunity to examine and implement a whole variety of common use rights systems which had earlier provided the rationale of the value systems of the community and conditioned the traditional perceptions of the fishery and its management.

Redefining the Role of Women

Even in the pre-development era there was one distinguishing feature of the fisheries sectors or the fish economies of both the developed and the developing countries. This was the early integration into trade networks even at very low levels of physical productivity of the harvesting activity. There are two important reasons for this. First, fish harvesters cannot live by fish alone. The moment they harvest more than a few fish they have an "exchangeable surplus" on their hands. Secondly, this surplus is highly perishable, and in tropical regions of the world, this is an additional pressure to exchange the surplus at the earliest.

Linked to this compulsion to enter into exchange relations is the need to involve people to carry out the physical activity of processing and movement of fish. These are the realms of production where women in fishing communities initially get actively involved together with their occasional involvements in harvesting on the aquatic milieu and gathering sedentary near-shore aquatic resources. Women thus come to play an integrative and nurturing role in the sector in the very early stages of its development. They have always been the primary producers of fishermen (thus helping to reproduce the economy too) and gradually come to deal with (sometimes even controlling) the activities which contribute to the greatest value addition in the fish economy.

Modern fisheries development had reinforced the compulsions of trade. But this has been done at the cost of marginalising women. Women who had an erstwhile role were displaced and those who have been brought in exploited.

In the new context of globalisation and the concomitant compulsions for more fish harvests and trade (particularly international trade with its innate search to find inexpensive resources and human labour), we need to make a careful examination of the role of women in the fisheries sector. This becomes

particularly important in the context of the growing evidence world-wide of the disruptive effects of modern fishery development and management policies on the fishing family and the socio-economic and cultural fabric of the communities. When crisis struck many fisheries world over, it was the spontaneous mobilisation by the women which re-invigorated dynamism into these communities and helped in successfully dealing with the subsequent process of redefining and reintegrating of fishworkers as critical social actors who could give positive direction to the dynamics of change.

If socio-cultural objectives are to become integral to the fisheries management approaches of the future, then the role of women needs to be redefined in totality.

International Markets, Home-spun Needs and Sustainability

Sustainability of the marine resource community will depend not only on the social and economic institutions created within the community and the nature of the technology of harvesting. It is importantly linked to the nature of the market which the fisheries sector will serve. Experiences of the past indicate very clearly that undue emphasis on seemingly lucrative export trade in a volatile international market produces quick short-term gains. But in the long-term, primarily because it leads to adoption of "throughput-efficient" but "ecologically-destructive" harvesting technologies, results in jeopardising the livelihood and welfare of the community and the integrity of the marine resource.

The globalisation of the fish market has meant the increasing ability to reach fish from one corner of the world to another in fresh condition. This puts in jeopardy the role of local fishermen to provide high quality prime fish to the domestic markets. This has also been a restructuring of the market and a consequent shift in the balance of power from the hands of producers (or those closer to them) to the secondary processors and retailers (importers, repackers, supermarket chains). This has meant that the labouring fishworkers get lower first-sale prices and a continually declining share of the increasing final consumer price. The combined impact of the globalisation and the restructuring has led to greater market volatility. Further the implications of the GATT on international fish trade is yet to be fully assessed from the perspective of fishing communities.

The vagaries of the international market make the home-spun needs of the domestic market, particularly in the developing countries, offer a far greater scope for gradual expansion of a more stable demand. The shorter trade linkages, and the need to keep prices within reach of the vast mass of local consumers, creates an inbuilt bias to ensure that harvesting technology and the forward linkages in processing and marketing are largely kept employment-intensive and cost-effective. Greater stress on creating a generic demand for fish in the domestic market cannot be underestimated. The role of enhanced south-south trade in certain opportune contexts will also have to be explored. These approaches worked out in tandem with the other agendas for change will contribute to overall sustainability of the resource and the community.

Financing Social Security Nets

Fishing communities, particularly in developing countries, are well known for their traditional systems of income sharing and collective social security. The aged, the maimed, the mentally and physically handicapped, widows and

orphans are assured "first charge" claims to the bounty of the sea which is brought in by the healthy and active in the community. The disadvantaged in the community are integrated into its social fabric by these collective mechanisms of caring and sharing. While it is true that these systems have also been casualties of the process of modern development, the important remnants of their ethos and essence need to be grafted to the new, innovative social security nets that are being evolved by the state in many instances. The finances for providing the foundation for such security nets can be raised by imposing a cess on all the stakeholders in the fishery who depend on the marine resource for their livelihoods and profits — the fishworkers and importantly the fish traders, fish processing and export firms. The viability and constitutionally validity of such a cess has been proven in India. It is only the political will to implement it in totality which is lacking.

Public Action for Health and Education

The correlation between wealth and welfare have been very tenuous in coastal fishing communities. The levels of infant mortality, morbidity and school dropouts are high while those of female literacy, life expectancy and overall educational attainments are low. It is a combination of occupational, economic, social, religious and cultural factors which account for this disadvantaged situation.

An assessment of the results of the enhancement of output and trade in fisheries clearly indicates that a growth-mediated, market driven strategy *per se* does not automatically led to human development within the sector. The experience in some countries where the disparities in human development levels between the fishing community and the rest of the population is considerable, point to the fact that even a support-led strategy by the state for social development need not produce the desired results. Only sustained collaborative and adversarial public action on the part of the community can ensure that it is able to achieve the desired levels of social and economic development. This public action needs to be undertaken contemporaneously both at the "micro" (family/village/community) and the "global" (sector/state) levels. Only such collective action can lead to distinct and sustainable improvements in health, education and overall welfare. The role which genuine fishworkers organisations will play in this context needs to be stressed. Writing these social considerations into overall fishery management perspectives is paramount.

CONCLUSION

Creating a new resource based community therefore calls for change of the social structure, the technology, the institutions and the participatory regime within the community. We see that social movements among fishing communities are on the rise. Sometimes these movements are interpreted to be mere "protests". However, on closer scrutiny, they reveal themselves as incorporating the quest for a symbiosis between people and environment; having a thrust on maintaining biological, economic and socio-cultural diversity; stressing decentralisation over centralisation and a focus on ensuring that the fruits of labour are primarily directed to meeting the basic needs of people. Sustaining such a community in this age of globalisation will require that we go beyond the narrow ideological prescriptions the broader canvass of consensus where people's resources, people's knowledge, people's concerns, people's ethics and people's spirituality have a place.