

### Where are the fishworkers?

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, provided the fundamental principles and the programme of action for achieving sustainable development. The Plan of Implementation finalized at the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD) that was held from 26 August to 4 September 2002, in Johannesburg, South Africa, was to further build on the achievements made since UNCED and expedite the realization of the remaining goals.

The Plan of Implementation recognizes that eradicating poverty is the greatest global challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development (Paragraph 6).

According to the FAO, in 1996 more than 30 million people were directly dependent on fishing for a livelihood. The majority are in the artisanal and small-scale sector and live in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The total number of people dependent on fisheries is likely to be over 150 million.

It is well-known that in the developing world the lives of artisanal and small-scale fishworkers in coastal fishing communities are, in general, characterized by poverty and a high degree of social and economic vulnerability. The reasons are varied and include insecure access rights to land and sea resources to which they have traditionally enjoyed access, high dependence on fisheries for a livelihood, uncertain fish harvests as a result of, among other things, natural fluctuations and poor management, and lack of skills and opportunities for alternative employment. In the absence of appropriate policies for fisheries and coastal area management, their activities are, in cases, contributing to an even greater pressure on resources.

Given this context one would have expected a greater focus on specific issues that are of concern to artisanal and small-scale fishworkers in the developing world in the Plan of Implementation. It is, therefore, quite disappointing that 'fishers' are mentioned only once in the Plan of Implementation.

The focus is rather on environmental aspects of fisheries management, which, though no doubt important, need to be looked at in conjunction with social aspects, if the twin goals of poverty eradication and sustainable development of fisheries resources have to be met. Thus, while Paragraphs 29 to 34 speak of the importance of, and strategies for, managing coastal and marine resources, there is no mention of artisanal and small-scale fishworkers who depend on these resources for their livelihood and who have a role in their management.

The Plan of Action that emerged from the WSSD fails to recognize that in poor, labour-surplus fishing economies, selective artisanal and small-scale fisheries are the vehicles for poverty eradication and sustainable development and there is no clear plan to support this sub-sector.

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It is well-known that in the developing world, the majority of fishworkers are coastal fishworkers in coastal fishing communities. These fishworkers are characterized by poverty and a high degree of social and economic vulnerability. They have traditionally enjoyed insecure access rights to land and sea resources to which they have traditionally engaged. High dependence on fisheries for a livelihood, uncertain fish harvests as a result of various other things, natural fluctuations and poor management, and lack of skills and opportunities for alternative employment, in the absence of appropriate policies for fisheries and coastal area management, their activities are, in cases, contributing to an even greater pressure on resources.

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A basic issue is that in the UNCED process fishers are clubbed together with farmers. Thus the language of the Plan of Implementation in the section on farmers does not specifically mention fishworkers, nor is it adapted to their specific contexts. The following example of Paragraph 38(i) is indicative:

- Adopt policies and implement laws that guarantee well defined and enforceable land and water use rights, and promote legal security of tenure, recognizing the existence of different national laws and/or systems of land access and tenure, and provide technical and financial assistance to developing countries as well as countries with economies in transition that are undertaking land tenure reform in order to enhance sustainable livelihoods;

In the context of fishworkers the following language would have been more appropriate:

- Adopt policies and implement laws that guarantee artisanal and small-scale fishworkers and their communities well-defined, non-transferable and enforceable rights to coastal and marine resources, and that promote legal security of tenure, to enhance sustainable livelihoods.

Similarly, Paragraph 6 (h) stresses the need for land tenure arrangements that recognize and protect indigenous and common property resource management systems. In the context of artisanal and small-scale fisheries the need is more specifically for tenure arrangements for coastal and marine resources that recognize and protect indigenous and common property resource management systems.

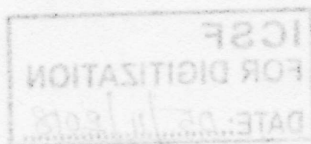
At the same time, while fishers and farmers undoubtedly have many issues in common, there are issues that are specific to fishworkers, of crucial importance to the sustainability of fisheries resources and to the life and livelihood of artisanal and small-scale fishworkers and their communities, which should have found mention in the Plan of Implementation:

These include, among others, the following:

- The need for fair and equitable fisheries arrangements, that protect the interests of both marine fisheries resources and of artisanal and small-scale fishing communities that depend on them.
- The need to explore the possibility of providing preferential access on specified terms to artisanal/ small-scale fishing vessels from neighbouring countries, especially in situations where there has been a tradition of migration of artisanal fishermen, to waters of coastal States with surplus fisheries resources
- The need to evolve, on a priority basis, necessary mechanisms for the release and repatriation of small-scale fishermen, arrested for transborder movement into waters of neighbouring States, taking into account the fact that such movement is often the result of poor fisheries management and depletion of local, coastal fisheries resources;

- The need for trade policies in fisheries that take into account the fact that free trade in fish and fish products, in the absence of effective management measures, leads to the rapid destruction of resources and of livelihoods of the majority of artisanal fishworkers.
- The need to prohibit the introduction of genetically modified organisms into the marine environment.

Thus, the Plan of Implementation, from the point of view of artisanal and small-scale fishworkers, is a disappointment. It fails to consolidate and take further the recognition that the sub-sector has made in earlier international processes, including the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the Jakarta Mandate on Coastal and Marine Biodiversity adopted by the Second Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1995.



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