

**THE FISHERFOLK OF ASIA :  
JUSTICE DENIED**

Report and Statement

of the

**FIFTH ASIAN FISHERFOLK CONSULTATION**

Edited by

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January 26-31 , 1992

Songkla, Thailand

**Asian Cultural Forum on Development**



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### **Justice: Not only Blind, but Deaf and Dumb as well**

During the first two days of the Asian Consultation, as fisherfolk from 11 Asian countries described their realities, it became clear that while situations differed from country to country, nevertheless a clear common pattern of denial of justice emerged:

\*\*\* In **Bangladesh**, during the recent floods, thousands of workers involved in aquaculture projects lost their lives. But the absentee owners of the aquaculture business wish to play no part in sharing the burden of loss with the surviving family members of their fishworkers.

\*\*\* Some 3,000 migrant **Philippine** fishermen working on Taiwanese Trawlers are the continuing victims of human rights abuse and exploitation.

\*\*\* Thousands of **Taiwanese** fishworkers languish in foreign jails (as do fishworkers from Pakistan and India) having committed no crime other than obeying the orders of the captains of their vessels.

Those captains who took the decision to poach illegally in national waters, roam free : unpunished and unaccountable. And why are these Sons of the Sea toiling as fishworkers for exploitative employers? Why are they fishworkers, rather than self- employed fisherfolk? The answers are varied but clear :

\*\*\* In **Pakistan** fisherfolk are caught as innocent pawns in a stirke at Karachi fish harbour as a result of a battle between two powerful commercial interest groups. The fisherfolk have nothing to do with this battle but they have to suffer the losses and consequences of the strike. Moreover, "outsider" middlemen have manipulated prices so that whereas 10 years ago the average earning of the fisherfolk would be Rs100 per day, today it is only Rs10-20 per day. Meanwhile, an indifferent government has raised the harbour tax that the fisherfolk have to pay, overnight, from Rs30 to Rs360!

\*\*\* In **Malaysia** too, middlemen feed parasitically upon the income and labour of the fisherfolk. Market manipulations impoverish the fisherfolk no matter how hard they are willing to labour.

\*\*\* In **Indonesia** fisherfolk in mangrove areas are witnessing the depletion of their fishery stocks as a result of environmental pollution & ecological changes caused by ever-growing areas being converted to aquaculture, providing tiger prawns for the dinner tables of Japan. It is the same in the



Philippines where the Japanese feast on the prawns while the Philippine fisherfolk must content themselves with eating the discarded prawn heads.

\*\*\* In Trang, Thailand foreign trawlers smash through artificial reefs, snatch away the catch from local waters, destroy the communities fish nets and flee, before the vessels can be impounded. The community has taken the matter to the police but the ecovandal robbers are beyond the reach of even " the long arm of the law".

\*\*\* The situation is similar in Vietnam where efforts by community fisherfolk to rebuild their lives in an impoverished war-ravaged economy, are cruelly frustrated by the inhuman greed of foreign commercial fishing interest groups.

\*\*\* In Sri Lanka the trawlers are even entering into and destroying lagoons.

\*\*\* On Chilika lake, India; in Songkla lake, Thailand; and in Laguna lake in the Philippines a common pattern of destruction of the marine resources emerges due to government policies and development projects (eg.-tourism development, accelerated industrialization) which bring quick profits to a few but only by destroying the ecology and sustainability of the lake's ecosystem and by pauperizing the fisherfolk. Soaring land prices due to these "development" activities have literally

deprived the fisherfolk of their livelihood, their habitat, and their very survival resources.

\*\*\* In **Bangladesh** one fisherman was beaten to death & several others assaulted by river police for having had the temerity to fish in the river. The widow remains dependent on the charity of her neighbours to keep her family alive, while the police haggle endlessly about the compensation they should be paying to her.

Unfortunately, that Bangladesh fisherman - murdered by the savagery of modern development - is but a symbol of the millions of Asian Fisherfolk who seek little more than their historical right to live off, by, and on the sea. Their rights of life, health, livelihood, community and culture are refused recognition and persistently violated even as "outsiders" and "newcomers" grow fat and rich by cannibalizing the resources of the fisherfolk communities on sea and land alike. In the light of such Asian realities, the fisherfolk of Asia ask: "What price Justice? And when?" So long as the Blind Lady remains unseeing; so long as deaf ears are turned to the pleas of Asian fisherfolk; and so long as voices in support of their just demands remain silent outside the community of Asian fisherfolk, justice for them will not only remain delayed, it will remain denied.

## Reflections on a Vanishing Heritage

The Consultation moved simply but effectively from description (of the problems & plight of Asian fisherfolk) to an analysis of both the immediate as well as the underlying structural causes. Three types of fishing categories and fishery ecosystems were identified : inland, coastal and deep sea. Inland ecosystems related to lakes, rivers, mangroves etc. A diversity of coastal configurations (island, gulf, peninsula, delta) were identified. Similarly, deep sea fishing was examined in the contexts of municipal waters, territorial seas, EEZ's (exclusive economic zones), the high seas, the continental shelf, the deep sea bed etc.

In all of these different fishery contexts two key concepts were of vital importance : environmental degradation and aquatic resources.

### Environmental Degradation :

In respect of each of the above fishery contexts and ecosystems, the Consultation undertook a careful identification of the nature and extent of environmental damage and pollution; the causes thereof; and the impacts upon the ecosystem. Pollution (domestic & industrial); over population; and over-consumption were undoubtedly prime causes of environmental degradation. But employment & income generation; export- promotion; and other

development priorities inimical to environmental protection (eg. dam building, forest-based agro-industrialization, adoption of chemical-intensive agriculture, mega-scale aquaculture, tourism development, development of free trade zones and export processing zones; accelerated zonal industrialization; infrastructure construction of highways, bridges and railways; etc.) constitute another, major and escalating cause of harmful environmental impacts and damage to (or conversion of) ecosystems. A related cause was the introduction of new, and environmentally destructive, technologies especially in respect of fishing methods.

Monitoring these environmental impacts and their causes; and developing strategies to limit the damage, and halt the continuation of such impacts; and rehabilitate the environment were identified as key areas for collective action.

### The Resource Base

Key to the future of fisherfolk is the aquatic resource base comprising not only marine species, but the soil, the water and plant species as well. The Consultation identified 4 crucial issues relating to the Resource Base:

(i) More effective and efficient utilization of the resource base so as to ensure and protect its sustainability.

(ii) Community control over resource manage-ment and the adoption of effective community resource management systems and plans.

(iii) Conservation of the resource base (with an emphasis on consumption limits), recycling and more effective utilization of wastes such as fish bone.

(iv) Rehabilitation of damaged environments such as coral and other reefs, mangroves, seabed grass etc.

The simultaneous twin focus on resources and environment was essential if the rapidly vanishing heritages (upon which fisherfolk depend for both their very existence and their well being and way of life) are to be saved from the ravages of modern development.

**"In Unity there is Strength. In Strength there is Success : Time to Unite, Time to Struggle".**

The above is the rallying slogan provided by the fisherfolk of the Philippines. In every country represented at the Consultation, this slogan had truth & validity. Organizing was the prime strategy for fisherfolk. Only through collective strength and countervailing power could they hope to arrest the forces that seek to destroy their livelihood & their very way of life.

At the consultation, experiences were shared regarding efforts of fisherfolk and of fishworkers to organize themselves. A thoughtful paper from Sri Lanka highlighted some of the pragmatic & ethical aspects of organizing fisherfolk. Experiences from the Philippines were shared about fisherfolk efforts at conscientization, mobilization, organization, federation, and coalition-building. The task for the Consultation was to address these issues moving from the national experiences to the sub-regional level (ASEAN and SAARC); the regional Asian level; and possibly the international level (UNCED and beyond).

However, key issues relating to gender justice and to human rights need to be addressed, if Asian fisherfolk are to effectively organize for collective action.

Several tasks for organizations of fisherfolk (national & regional alike) were identified:

- (i) Networking and linkaging
- (ii) Training of fisherfolk, by fisherfolk, on issues relating both to technology & to ecology
- (iii) Community Resource Management
- (iv) Monitoring and pressing for enforcement of existing pro-fisherfolk laws: national & international
- (v) Fisherfolk-initiated law and policy reform.

### **Field visits: Glimpses of the Thai reality**

There were two field visits organised during the consultation.

#### **Trang Province**

Trang Province, with a population of some 550,000, is the scene of the activities of the well respected "Yad Fon Association" (which literally translates as Raindrop Association). The visit began in a village where the visitors were able observe both the socio-economic conditions as well as income-producing activities and their environmental impacts.

In the first village visited, the economic strata were clearly reflected in the 5 types of houses present. The first, comprised a few bare rooms on stilts with an outside toilet. There was little in the rooms but a mat on the floor. These houses were provided to the labour force coming from outside the village. A second type of house was also rather small and on stilts but with mat walls. The kitchen/living room was often on 3 sides and contained a few inexpensive vessels and a simple (antiquated) coke oven. There were many such houses and these, as well as a third type of house (slightly large with a small vegetable garden, and some with sheet roofing) housed the majority of the village population. A fourth type of house, partly made of concrete,



was the house and shop of the local grocer. By far the most affluent was the house of the village headman: very new, made solidly out of mangrove plants, with stilts at least 7 feet from the ground level, flooring and a staircase made from plankwood, and with numerous household equipment including a local paddy-shelling machine.

There were two charcoal factories on the shore which burn the mangrove bark. Both had absentee owners living in town, one of whom was influential in politics. There was also a small local boat-building yard and a small rubber factory. There were several fish cages on the coast. The visiting fisherfolk from Pakistan noted a type of fish basket (made employing a local technique) some 12 feet x 6 feet in size; with fish present weighing between 500 grams and 750 grams. This type of fish basket it was felt, would be useful in Pakistani fish villages. So too would a kind of net: 2 metres wide, cut in halves, and with smaller eyes and firmer knots than those in Pakistan. However, the crab cages observed seemed less useful than one's used in Pakistan employing thick nylon rope (which has proven to be both cheap and effective).

A second coastal village visited appeared quite poor but Yad Fon was working well there trying to involve everybody - both poor and powerful - so that the work of the organisation could proceed smoothly. In the first village visited, the emphasis was on sharing experiences regarding fishing techniques. In the coastal village, the participants

learned a lot mainly about organisational experiences, especially to resist trawlers. Everyday several boats go out and are on the alert to spot any trawlers in the vicinity. If they observe a trawler within a 3 kilometres range, they come back, collect more people and boats, and resist the trawlers' further entry. One of the ways of resistance is to place thousands of crab traps in the way of the trawler. If the trawler ignores such traps and smashes through them, the nets of the trawlers get entangled with the broken crab traps. This damages the trawler's nets and slows down the fishing. Moreover, the villagers negotiate payment of damages in respect of the destroyed crab traps. Another strategy for resisting the trawlers has been adoption by the villagers of projects to protect sea turtles. The presence of the nests of sea turtles is then used to stimulate adequate protection by government authorities since sea turtles are a protected species in Thailand and the trawler's nets, not being selective, would destroy the nests as well. One of the fisherfolk from Pakistan observed that despite areas where the water was good, and the mangrove cover thick, there were still few fish. This he attributed to the overfishing off shore and in the deep-seas, by the trawlers. He made a plea that positive steps be taken to halt this deprivation of the livelihood of small fisherfolk, by effective action against indiscriminate off-shore and deep sea fishing.

Another common problem noted related to ownership of land. As in Pakistan, the Thai vil-

lagers did not own the land but were in mere possession - in Pakistan, lasting over 500 years! The few who have papers to show rights to land are being induced to sell their land to resort developers and owners. Thus, the issue of recognition and protection of fisherfolks rights to land was seen as an important one in the Asian context.

The people said that the mangroves in the island were totally destroyed and had to be replanted by them. They had also replanted seagrasses having observed that some fish, spawn in the mangroves and after some time the spawn go over to the seagrasses for feeding. Similarly, some mollusks lay eggs in the seagrasses, but the larvae graze and feed at the mangrove bay. From this, the villagers have concluded that both mangrove and seagrasses are very important for sustaining marine life.

The Trang visit provided ample opportunity for South-South sharing. As mentioned before, innovative fishing techniques were observed and discussed. Information was provided to the villagers as well: about improved and appropriate fishing boat designs, about management practices regarding cleaning of nets in fish cages and the importance of supplementary feeding to improve the produce within the fish cages. Experience from other parts of Asia was shared as to the introduction of food pellets (made from cow dung and rice brawn) to provide an alternative source of food in fish cages to thus reduce the consumption by fish of their own spawn within the cages. Similarly, a

plant was observed growing in profusion (but left unutilised) in one of the villages where the incidence of malnutrition among children was high. The techniques used in West Bengal, where such plants are used as a nutritional supplement, were shared as well with the villagers. Hence, the Trang visit emphasized sharing: of experiences, of problems and of strategies; and building: appreciation, and links in a common struggle ahead.

### Songkla Lake

The second field visit focused on Songkhla Lake. But the visit began not on the Lake, but very much on land - with a visit to one of the leading aquaculture research institutes in Asia. This handsomely equipped, generously funded institute is a gift from Japanese ODA(Official Development Assistance). Japanese ODA is under very heavy fire from environmental groups in Japan today and the Institute visited would not escape such fire. A remarkable monument to modern science, this Institute epitomizes the "Man over Nature" syndrome that has made modern hi-tech development the single-largest threat to environmental sustainability. The Institute conducts thorough research, of utmost scientific quality, on every aspect relating to three marine species: grouper, sea bass, and tiger prawns. From germination and birth, through child care, growth, health and disease these 3 species receive scientific attention and thoroughness at a level few human species (especially children in developing countries) receive.

But two factors seem to have dominated priority setting: the tastes and demands of the Japanese consumer; and the profit making potential of the research. At the Institute we were told that Thailand's earnings from the export of tiger prawns last year was in the region of Baht 25 billion (approximately US\$ 1 billion)! What we saw at the Institute was fascinating, awe-inspiring in terms of the power and potential of modern-day science. But it was also crassly commercial and strangely sad in its implications for a future in which "fish factories" will efficiently churn out a standardised product - of highest quality. But without the crest of the wave; by rendering the skills, craft and art of the fisherfolk obsolete; and by rendering their joyous and vibrant cultural expressions extinct. To recall St. Francis perhaps we may wonder "What doth it profit a man?" And the gender bias involved is as stark, as gender concerns are conspicuous by their absence on the agenda of the Institute. In their vision of the future we need not use the term "fisherfolk". "Fisherman" will suffice.

But let us hasten to clarify that the above is not meant to be only a critique of the Institute. That would be, in Asian cultural terms, churlish in view of the openness and hospitality they accorded us. It is rather a lament as to where we are going? Why? and How? -- in the rush to development and materialistic satisfaction. It is also a collective invitation extended by the fisherfolk of Asia to the Institute (and others) to join in serious and sombre

introspection together as we face our common future.

We next visited a village which had been the site of a successful government project for the betterment of fisherfolk communities. The village we visited (Ban Wat Krachay Talay) has a population of 905 persons in 170 families and is 90% Muslim. The problems faced by the village were typical of the area: unemployment, poor sanitation, poor education, and lack of fresh water during summer. The government development project for the village sought to supply and demonstrate how cheaper fishery equipment could be acquired and used. A boat-towing site was to be constructed and so too a building for boat repair and maintenance. The latter was both for the villages own use as well as to generate income from repair of boats of outsiders. Processing of marine products (eg: fish sauce, shrimp paste) would help augment the village income and a cooperative shop (for basic consumption necessities and for spare parts) would reduce indebtedness. By the Project's third year, living conditions had so improved as to justify a 50% reduction of the project budget from Baht 50,000 to Baht 20,000 annually. A Coastal Fisheries Development Circulation Fund was set up. The village children's play ground was renovated and 6 scholarships awarded to poor children for their education. The government project manager stresses that despite the progress made, continuing problems persist of indebtedness and of depletion of village catch due to over-fish-

ing. We introduced ourselves and tried to get to know the people who had taken the trouble to host us at that late hour of the day better. But there were linguistic problems. Such problems could not however, impede the tremendous enthusiasm behind the responses we received, or the brightness of the smiling faces all around us.

Our visit to Songkla Lake itself began the next morning. We started by visiting a village on the lake's Southern part so that we could traverse the salt, brackish water and fresh water portions of the Lake. In contrast to the village we had visited the previous day, this village showed visible signs of poverty. The standard of living was low and dwelling places reflected a situation of scarcity and poverty. There were some income-generating projects clearly visible in individual households. But these involved poultry-rearing or piggery projects and we noticed that the fowl and animal wastes were being directly released into the Lake. In fact, one of our Taiwanese participants expressed concern about the pollution of the Lake from pig farming. He also expressed concern about the pumping of water from the lake for income-generating "ponds" including aquaculture projects which was being done in a manner that affects the level of the Lake to a point where its ecology is vulnerable to disruption in ways which are compounded by other environmental problems. Even as the water level of the Lake gets lowered because of consumption of water for small scale income-generation pond related activities; by

consumption of water in large-scale aquaculture projects; and literal "mining" of lake water for industrial activity or urban consumption; the level of the earth in the lake might be increasing because of increased siltation (partly due to deforestation) and increased soil erosion (due to unsustainable agricultural practices). The combination results in serious disruption of the ecology of the lake.

As we set forth in two small motor powered boats, under weather conditions which were hardly adverse, we soon realised the hazards faced by the fisherfolk of Songkhla. Both our boats soon suffered hull damage due to striking unknown objects and both began leaking seriously. This meant neither boat could make stops as planned to take a closer look at prawn aquaculture operations and affected communities. But even so, as we traversed the length of the Lake we passed sites where proposed dam construction ( to create water for irrigation) is creating conflict between Songkhla communities of subsistence fisherfolk and communities of subsistence farmers. We passed large areas converted to tiger prawn aquaculture and can only guess at the environmental impacts of such a move. The Lake itself was marked out and subdivided in what appeared to be a highly organised manner to enable the routine fishing and prawn farming activities to proceed in an orderly fashion.

But choppy waters, and the conditions of our boats prevented us from any closer contact with Lake communities as we sped towards Palicai - the site



of tourism development and a museum. The construction of a long highway connecting the islands within the Lake has been part of the tourism development necessities. But the very existence of this highway - a monument to modern engineering technology, has itself altered access to the Lake and thereby its ecology.

Participants in the Songkhla field trip had the opportunity to marvel at the natural wonders and bounty of the Lake; and yet had the opportunity to appreciate the daily hardship faced by the fisherfolk of the Lake in pursuing their livelihood. We had less of an opportunity than we would have liked, to meet and interact with the communities we had planned to visit along the Lake. But we were not disappointed that still, even to day, on Songkhla Lake nature can prevail over the best-laid plans of man.

## **Fishery Ecosystems and Anti-Fisherfolk Ecovandals**

In order to enable greater participation and to deepen the sharing of experiences and planning of actions, the participants formed 4 workshops. Each workshop focused on a specific ecosystem providing a specific fishery context. Each workshop examined the importance of such ecosystem; the problems encountered in such ecosystem; what is presently being done and what more needs to be done (how and why) to deal with the problems; and how better use existing regional and international linkages and strengthen them or augment them where necessary.

### **INLAND FISHERIES**

This group focused on 3 specific brackish water lake ecosystems: Chilka (in India), Laguna (in the Philippines) and Songkla (in Thailand). The importance of these ecosystems can be best realised by the various activities generated around them which greatly benefit the respective countries. The main socio-economic activities are fishing and aquaculture. But the lake also provides a habitat for birds and plants. Large populations of fisherfolk and farmers depend upon the inland waters of the lake to sustain their livelihood and provide food. Other uses are for settlement, tourism,

transportation and, more recently, to supply water for a variety of industrial processes.

The problems encountered are ecological, socio-economic, political and cultural. Siltation is a major ecological problem common to all of the inland ecosystems. Pollution, resulting from deposits of industrial and agricultural chemicals and wastes and of domestic and animal wastes, is both a common and serious problem. The narrowing of the lake areas due to siltation and other causes of water shortage form the basic problem, transforming the very nature of the lake. Moreover, especially in Songkhla lake, there is the additional problem of mangrove destruction. These environmental problems (sometimes exacerbated by overfishing by trespassing large fishing vessels) has greatly reduced the resources of the lakes. The majority of the people who depend on these vital ecosystems are generally poor and illiterate therefore. Their extreme poverty sometimes forces them to resort to illegal and destructive fishing practices such as the use of plastic nets and collection of fish eggs, which further accelerate the degradation of the inland fisheries. As a result conflicts over scarce resources are erupting giving rise. to political problems as local and provincial governments fail to cope with such conflicts. The fisherfolk are denied the chance to participate in the decision- making processes. As a result, the governments initiate development programs and activities (such as the building of dams and port), which are highly detrimental both to the fisherfolk

and to the inland fisheries. Moreover, the fisherfolk are denied the right to control and manage their resources. Instead, such right is often given to unscrupulous entrepreneurs who are interested only in their own profits, to the detriment of the environment. Cultural problems arise as fisherfolk are forced to move away from their traditional means of livelihood and as poverty generates illiteracy.

Several measures are being presently undertaken to address the problems:

- (i) fisherfolk are organising themselves both for community resource management and for lobbying.
- (ii) fisherfolk organisations and coalitions are engaged in policy advocacy, lobbying their respective governments to reform policies and programs.
- (iii) educational activities, campaigns, pickets, and demonstrations are being organised by the fisherfolk and support groups to raise public awareness and generate public support.
- (iv) there are both government initiatives (especially in Thailand) and NGO efforts to provide assistance to the fisherfolk.
- (v) protest actions are being launched by the fisherfolk who are also attempting to build coali-

tions with other organised sectors not directly concerned with fishing.

But much more needs to be done to:

(i) strengthen peoples organisation through training, support services etc.;

(ii) better study the ecology of inland ecosystems;

(iii) educate fisherfolk and other people on the environmental aspects;

(iv) alleviate pollution through appropriate measures;

(v) dredge the silt in the lakes and retard the pace of siltation;

(vi) promote recognition and respect of the rights of the fisherfolk to manage resources;

(vii) ensure much needed assistance from government and NGO's to distressed fisherfolk;

(viii) secure effective reform of fishery policies, laws and practices;

(ix) strengthen the systems for consultations between fisherfolk and scientists and experts on rehabilitation of inland fisheries;

(xi) lobby for support in international organisations.

In sum, an Asia-wide campaign needs to be launched for the empowerment of the fisherfolk and for the rehabilitation of inland waters.

Since organising was commonly agreed to be a key strategy, this workshop also spent time examining what problems are encountered in organising effectively for action, and how the fisherfolk organisations and NGO's participating in the workshop addressed such problems of organisation.

The problems encountered included:

--- poverty of the fisherfolk (and of the people more generally) which make them very vulnerable to loansharks especially in view of the inadequacy of resources and services provided by governments.

--- lack of organisational skills, especially for organisation of people at the grassroots level.

--- lack of government support and lack of policies promoting the welfare of fisherfolk.

--- the present adverse economic situation, in many Asian countries, is forcing both directly and indirectly, fisherfolk into taking measures at an in-

dividual level thus hampering them from interacting with one another and getting organised.

--- those in power at the local level (eg. heads of villages) are precisely the ones exploiting the fisherfolk.

--- a majority of the fisherfolk are illiterate and hence only the rich people become leaders especially in the local political structures.

--- harrassment by the local police (or the military) hampers attempts at organisation.

The organisations of fisherfolk and supportive NGO's have adopted a number of measures to address these problems:

--- separate womens' groups have been formed which have started alternative livelihood projects.

--- new group income-generating activities have been initiated to enhance existing fisherfolk organisations.

--- skills training has been provided to fisherfolk on group establishment and follow-up thereafter.

--- vocational groups (eg. on fish culture, cooperative store management) have been organised.

--- campaigns to cut down unnecessary household expenses and education programs on loansharking have been initiated.

--- fisherfolk leadership training modules and modules on organisational skills have been developed.

--- dialogues have been conducted with military.

--- dialogues and other efforts have been initiated with government agencies to extend fisherfolk assistance (financial, technical and otherwise).

The workshop made two main recommendations:

(1) Fisherfolk should be well organised (from grassroots level to regional level) through their own peoples organisations. Both NGO's and government organisations should assist in technical and financial aspects. NGO's should be more closely related and linked not only at the local but also at the national and regional level so that resources and expertise can be better shared.

(2) Exchange of information and communications should be encouraged and sustained (eg. through exposure and intervisitation programs)

MANGROVES

This workshop discussed the situation of existing mangroves in different Asian countries but with a



careful analysis of the situation in Songkhla. It also examined issues relating to aquaculture especially in relation to mangroves and with particular reference once again, to the situation in Songkhla.

The ecology of Songkhla lake could be broken down basically as terrestrial and aquatic. The terrestrial portion comprises mangrove forests and marsh lands. The aquatic portion comprises the partly brackish water-body in which seaweeds, seagrasses, fish and shell-fish grow.

Mangroves are extremely important ecosystems. They provide the niche for certain species of water-birds and are vital in the food chain so far as aquatic species are concerned. They are essential in maintaining natural equilibrium in the waters adjacent and have an important bearing upon spawning grounds. The mangroves in Songkhla are typical of most mangroves in their contribution not only to ecology but to economy as well. The Songkhla mangroves are the mainstay of over 200 communities of fisherfolk comprising over 100,000 persons. They are a major site for fish-cage culture as well as commercial aquaculture activities. The mangrove forests serve as windbreakers. Their scenic nature makes them suitable for tourism and generates revenues. Agriculturalists gather forest products and use the wood from mangroves both for home construction purposes as well as to make charcoal. In Songkhla they have attracted settlement areas as well as the construction of fishing and transportation piers and docks.

Unfortunately, in Songkla and elsewhere, serious problems have arisen out of the terrestrial - aquatic interaction typical of mangroves. Upland agriculture is producing siltation and run offs from chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides. Increased utilization of water for agricultural purposes has resulted in an appreciable decline in water discharge to the lake. Untreated water from municipal wastes and industrial plants is polluting the lake and so too are human and animal wastes. The mangroves are being encroached upon by large scale aquaculture shrimp farms. They are also being cleared for settlement of people displaced from their own lands by tourism development, golf course construction and other development activities. They are damaged by careless hunting of water birds. As fishery resources of the lake dwindle due to pollution, overfishing and other environmental disturbances, the poverty stricken fisherfolk are forced into operation of illegal fishing methods and gear, triggering a vicious cycle of destruction. The construction of the Songkhla Deep Sea Port causes delays in the tidal movements of the lake as it blocks the water inlet to the lake. This leads to further siltation, a loss of water quality, a species quality deterioration and a decline of species. The construction of the proposed Songkhla dam (to block the flow of brackish waters and enhance irrigation capabilities for agriculture) will completely disrupt the aquatic ecosystem of the lake.

There have been government efforts to address some of the problems. Shrimp farm operation is being controlled by zoning of areas appropriate for shrimp farming and by preventing new entrepreneurs from entering the business. There has been stricter enforcement of forestry laws (especially in sanctuary areas) and of hunting regulations. The government authorities have been releasing fish and shrimp fry to augment the declining resources of the lake. There has been promotion of fish-cage culture especially in respect of sea bass and grouper. Sea-weed culture experimentation is being undertaken and there is experimentation with the construction of "fish apartments".

NGO's have been encouraging the organising of fisherfolk to conserve aquatic resources and to conserve and restore the mangrove forests. NGO's and private sector organisations are attempting to co-ordinate with government agencies in releasing aquatic life into the lake. They are lobbying government for stricter enforcement of laws including those dealing with off-shore fishing and are suggesting policy improvements.

Much more needs to be done of course. The rights of fisherfolk communities over the water-body adjacent to them need to be recognised and respected. Peoples organisations need to be strengthened by training. More studies need to be undertaken on mangrove ecology to find appropriate solutions to present problems and to enhance sustainable

resource usage. A zoning system for mangrove waters, and wet-land management must be imposed and implemented. Revolving funds and group savings schemes are needed to resolve chronic debt problems. Appropriate pollution - abatement measures are urgently needed as are adequate central waste-treatment plants. Periodic removal of silt deposits must be undertaken. Campaigns must be stepped up directed at upland agriculturists to increase their concern about the environmental impacts of chemical spillovers. Land-use policies need to be revised and implemented regarding paddy lands, aesthetic areas and other environmentally important areas. NGO's and academics must strive to better compile and collate past and on-going learning efforts.

As with the other working groups, here too there was a priority need expressed to strengthen organising and organisational skills especially for people at the grassroots level. It was noted that the organising process is being weakened by the modern economy and by the present economic situation which hampers collective activity and encourages individualistic responses. The governments' lack of policy and lack of dispute settlement mechanisms in respect of fisherfolk - farmer interactions was also noted.

The workshop made several recommendations.

- (1) An almost identical recommendation to that made by the inland fisheries workshop called for

better organisation of fisherfolk at grassroots, national and regional levels and for NGO's to be better linked not only at local and national levels but at regional level as well.

(2) Greater government allocation of financial and technical resources to fisherfolk organisations was called for.

(3) Better communication among fisherfolk was called, for especially in respect of new techniques to improve production. This could be achieved on a small-group basis, through field visits and inter-visitation programs.

So far as aquaculture in mangroves are concerned, the workshop called for:

(1) Asian Regional Level action in respect of dissemination of information (especially about fisherfolk agriculture and forest aquaculture). Compilation of relevant fishery and forestry laws on an Asian basis was desirable. Training at regional level was also urged.

(2) Exchanges of leaders of peoples organisations (both fishers and farmers) was necessary especially to promote solidarity Asian actions in support of national struggles.

(3) Training and organising at local level and increased linking at local and district levels was also called for.

## COASTAL FISHERIES

Most of the problems of coastal fisherfolk had been detailed in country papers submitted to the Consultation. Hence, this workshop concentrated on 4 sets of recommendations:

### (1) Education and Training

Recognizing that the coastal poor are a very low and disadvantaged lot, a special and intense effort is needed to be made in respect of education and training. Moreover, in view of the impact of development activities outside the fisheries sector upon the coastal poor, it was asserted that no development program be complete without an education and training component. Pictorial material and comic books, puppetry, folk media and extension materials would be ideally suited to educate the coastal poor. A special emphasis should be placed upon educating fisherwomen at large. "Educate a man and you educate just one person. Educate a woman and you educate a family" was the slogan of the group. Encouraging women to be active participants in cooperative enterprises, in community activities and decision-making is to be encouraged.

### (2) Information-sharing

Since NGO's face Herculean tasks in respect of the coastal poor, it is essential that they not work in isolation but share and exchange information

among themselves. Net-working and the building up of a sound documentation system, accessible to all NGO's working with the coastal poor, were clear priorities.

### (3) Organisation of the Coastal Poor.

Here it was stressed that organising was vital for participation both at local as well as at national planning processes and decision- making levels.

### (4) Campaigns

Local, national and regional campaigns needed to be organised to make the presence of the coastal poor felt and to assist in the fight for their rights.

## OFF SHORE AND DEEP SEA FISHING

Before addressing its agenda, this workshop first clarified the meaning of the term "international waters" since the marine resources of international waters belong to all the nations of the world and not just to those countries with the technology to exploit such resources. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defines the term "international waters". Since most UN members are a party to UNCLOS (with the notable exception of the United States) it was felt important to place the discussions in this workshop with the context of three key principles affirmed by UNCLOS:

(1) Marine and mineral resources in the high seas are the "common heritage of mankind".

(2) There must be equitable sharing of these resources.

(3) Special provisions must be made in favour of "landlocked and geographically disadvantaged countries".

In discussing these principles however, it became clear that while deep-seabed mining of mineral resources are controlled by elaborate rules (licensing and regulating the sharing of such resources) there are no counter-part measures for regulating deep-sea fishing in international waters or sharing of aquatic resources.

The importance of deep-sea marine resources can hardly be exaggerated. They are not presently threatened by extinction and are still rich and abundant. However, these resources are currently being exploited at an astonishing rate (as the deep-sea fisheries production levels of Japan and Taiwan clearly establish) and without any kind of monitoring. Concrete data is lacking as to how much is being depleted. Deep-seabed mining of minerals (often with radioactive implications) will once again cause unknown and unmonitored ecological impacts with possible poisoning of the food chain and further destruction of the marine ecosystem. Moreover, these activities in the deep seas are very difficult to monitor. But the deep sea is intimately



related to coastal and municipal waters. Exploiting it disturbs the food supply of those who are dependent on near waters. Moreover, once coastal subsistence fishing is destroyed, the coastal fisherfolk will have little choice but to give up their traditional methods and turn to deep sea methods - often as exploited fishworkers. Properly managed, the deep sea waters become a vital zone for regeneration of marine resources. Its abundance could enhance and contribute to the advantage of all nations.

But serious problems plague the deep-sea fishery sector. The unmonitored, rapacious fishing activity of deep-sea vessels is a major problem, the devastating effects of which are as yet unknown. Monitoring and enforcement (by whom and how) are extremely problematic. Deep-sea fishing methods presently used are unselective and as a consequence, there is large scale dumping of tons of by-catch fish which itself creates a serious problem. As a result, the lives and livelihoods of small fisherfolk are endangered. They are faced with vanishing species, reduction of catch, increasing impoverishment and declining life standards especially in respect of basic needs.

Awareness of the seriousness of the problem has prompted some efforts by fishing communities to control trawler incursions - as the field visits to Trang and Songkla indicated. Some governments have adopted policies in support of such community initiatives. Organisations of fisherfolk are

stepping up efforts to educate themselves to implement conservation policies. But much still needs to be done to protect coastal fisherfolk who face the demise of their traditional fishing efforts. Ecologically sound intermediate off-shore fishing technology needs to be developed otherwise, the present methods employed by the multinational fishing companies will provide the only commonly available alternative. Subsistence fisherfolk need to be protected against the only other alternative available to them of becoming exploited fishworkers for employees who further deplete the fishery resources. Protected areas need to be extended and vigorously defended. Extending the reach of subsistence fisherfolk in terms of distance from the shore line must not be seen as an end in itself. But at best, as a temporary solution and linked to restoration of the coastal eco-system. Moreover these restoration and conservation efforts must be seen not as the responsibility of subsistence fisherfolk alone but rather as an environmental issue to be addressed by national governments, environmental groups and international agencies. In respect of illegal trawling, governments must limit the time of such fishing activity; monitor net mesh; prohibit certain kinds of fishing gear such as purse nets; negotiate and adjudicate responsibility of transit states and states which tranship illegal gear. In respect of by-catch dumping, if a vessel has non-selective gear and returns to port with a selective catch then it must be presumed that by-catch has been dumped and the company and captain of the vessel should be sanc-

tioned through fines, confiscation of catch, and other effective measures. Second and repeat offenders should be subjected to criminal penalties. National governments and the UN system must support efforts by fisher communities to attain real accountability and if necessary, punitive actions should be taken against offending governments. Severe economic sanctions can be imposed; confiscated catch can be auctioned under international supervision. Vessels can be confiscated as a preventive and deterrent measure. And it is essential that in implementing these kinds of policies and measures, representatives of fisherfolk must be fully involved. Thus, for example, to avoid bribery of national officials, a Review Board could be established composed of fisher representatives, government representatives and independent technical experts. Such a Board could review complaints and impose sanctions. Funds received from auctioning of confiscated catch could be used to establish a Fund to compensate injured subsistence fishing communities as well as exploited crew on deep-sea vessels.

Perhaps a National Task Force, in each of the Asian countries participating in the Consultation, could be constituted:

- to expose the fishery outlaws in the region
- to organise consumer boycotts and create consumer awareness

-- to lobby and agitate against government policies which sacrifice small fisherfolk such as the Taiwan/Philippines Transit Treaty

-- to oppose uncontrolled foreign investment in shrimp ponds

-- to train fishworkers in matters related to detention and to provide support for detained crew from deep sea vessels

-- to hold deep-sea vessel captains and companies accountable for illegal fishing activities

-- to address human rights violations of fisherfolk.

The workshop proposed several follow-up actions to the Consultation:

(1) Asian Campaigns to identify and expose deep-sea fishery criminals by documenting the activities of the deep-sea fishing countries of Asia and of non-Asian countries operating with in Asia.

(2) Identification of bilateral treaties (such as the Japan/Philippines treaty and the Taiwan/Philippines transit agreement) which are harmful to both subsistence fisherfolk and to the ecology as the first step in an Asian campaign to press for the abrogation of such agreements.

(3) Organisation of an Asian, training of trainers workshop for leaders of fisherfolk organisations on

the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Such a workshop would analyze provisions of UNCLOS which could be invoked in support of efforts of subsistence fisherfolk; it would review specific Asian government positions and obligations in respect of UNCLOS and generally explore how subsistence fisherfolk can use UNCLOS to their best advantage.

(4) Organisation of an Asian seminar which would bring together human rights groups, womens groups, environmental groups, consumer and other public interest groups to discuss with fisherfolk organisations and NGO's in the fishery sector how to better support the efforts of the fisherfolk at national and Asian level through campaigns, rallies, boycotts etc.

(5) Lobby for a national tax to be imposed upon products of deep-sea fishing. Even if such law is not enacted, such a lobbying campaign could serve as a public education and organising strategy which could be backed up by national and international consumer boycotts.

The workshop ran out of time before it could discuss the question of regional and international linkages. The participants hoped however that their specific proposals for follow-up might help forge such linkages.

## An Emerging Action Agenda for Asian Fisherfolk

Several elements of an Asian agenda emerged at the Consultation:

(1) Information-Sharing : through existing newsletters and publications (such as Fishnet and other publications) as well as through new mechanisms (eg. - an ACFOD Collection of Videos made by or about fisherfolk in Asia). This collection could be made available (on loan or at cost) to Asian fisherfolk organizations for training and to NGO's for public education programs.

(2) Regional Training and Inter-visitation Programs.

(3) Strengthening Organization of Asian Fisherfolk at sub-regional (ASEAN, SAARC) and regional Asian level and more effective Asian linking with international fisherfolk organizations.

(4) Regional Asian Actions and Campaigns eg. - to press for the abrogation of the Philippine/Taiwan Treaty of Transit. Solidarity and "hot-line" action campaigns when fisherfolk become the victims of human rights abuses (eg. - fishworkers in foreign prisons).

(5) Regional Asian Fisherfolk Participation in International Institutions eg. - UN Human Rights Commission; G A T T; World Bank; F A O etc.

This general agenda for action was intended to provide a response to needs identified at the Consultation. It was addressed to no specific set of actors but rather, identified what to be done for the benefit of those who might take their own action initiatives in response.

The Consultation also identified a specific action agenda addressed specifically to those at the Consultation and intended to be implemented as minimal follow-up to the Consultation. This specific action agenda has 4 components.

#### A. Information Exchange

Here, 5 specific activities are involved:

(i) Strengthening Fishnet (the existing newsletter for communication among Asian fisherfolk) by revising its format, strengthening its contents, and possibly changing its name to reflect the new expectations and new roles that Fishnet is to play.

(ii) Collection and distribution of reports, study papers, case studies, videos, slides etc. ACFOD will serve (until a fisherfolk organisation alternative becomes feasible) as the collection and distribution focal point of such materials.

(iii) Preparation by, and distribution among, fisherfolk organisations and support groups of country profiles on the situation of diverse fisherfolk communities in the countries of Asia.

(iv) Collection and distribution of information on appropriate technologies for conservation, growth and management of fishery and aquatic resources.

(v) Collection and dissemination of fishery and fishery-related laws in the countries of the Asian region.

#### B. Education and Training

Here, four specific activities are planned:

(i) Encouraging training at local and national levels,

(ii) Facilitating the sharing of training materials locally, nationally and regionally.

(iii) Organising an Asian Training of Trainers Workshop for leaders of fisherfolk organisations on the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas and related issues.

(iv) Organising an Asian workshop on sharing of training experiences and materials.



### C. Policy Advocacy and Regional Campaigns at Asian Level

Here, a four fold focus has been selected:

- (i) Protection and Restoration of Mangroves.
- (ii) "Save the Lakes"
- (iii) "No Bilateral Government Agreements" at the expense of small and subsistence Asian fisherfolk.
- (iv) Multinationals (Asian and non-Asian) in fisheries.

### D. Organising and Solidarity Actions

Here 5 specific activities are planned:

- (i) National consultations to consolidate local and national fisherfolk organisations
- (ii) Exchange visits between fisherfolk organisations :both within and between the countries of Asia.
- (iii) Organisation of an Asian Fisherfolk Assembly at suitable intervals (possibly of 3 years).
- (iv) Organising a parallel fisherfolk peoples summit during ASEAN and SAARC intergovernmental meeting for lobbying purposes.

(v) Creating an interim coordinating team of representatives of fisherfolk organisations and support groups to ensure the implementation of the above specific follow-up action program and to catalyze activities relating to the above general follow-up action agenda.

This is undoubtedly an ambitious agenda, but one which is urgently needed to be addressed if the traditional fisherfolk of Asia, an already endangered group, are not to become extinct. Moreover, their struggles against extinction and their struggle for justice must become the common struggle of all Asian people as well. The future of Asian fisherfolk represents in fact, the future of all the people of Asia. Their struggles are against a parasitic, cannibalistic; self-destructive approach to economic development and modernization. Their struggles are for human, sustainable, participatory and just development. The success of their struggles holds the key to the future of all Asian peoples.

## **Statement of the 5th Asian Fisherfolk Consultation**

January 31, 1992

Prince of Songkla University, Hat-yai Songkhla,  
THAILAND

WE, the delegates of small fisher groups and organizations of Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam, gathered at the 5th Asian-Fisherfolk Consultation (sponsored and organized by the Small Fishworker Development Program of the Asian Cultural Forum on Development) do hereby make the following statement on the conditions of work and life, the plight and the rights of small fishermen in Asia.

### 1. Traditional Livelihood and Traditional Resource Base

We DEMAND recognition and respect of the rights of small fisherfolk to

their continued use of traditional fishing grounds and resources; and of their right to their traditional livelihood and culture.

In our visit to Songkla Lake we have observed the conversion of large areas of the lake to aquaculture prawn farms posing grave threats to the environment and livelihood. We note with alarm, plans

relating to dam construction on the lake which plans are generating conflicts between subsistence fisherfolk and subsistence farmers of Songkla and which will also have grave and irreversible consequences on ecology.

We therefore CALL UPON governments, and other authorities, and private vested interest groups not to deprive the fisherfolk of Asia of their traditional resources in name of tourism, industry and other development activities

## 2. Destruction and Depletion of Fishery Resources

We CONDEMN all actions of destruction, diminution and depletion of fishery resources through technologies such as trawling, drag nets, purse-seine nets etc.

We RAISE OUR VOICES against the frequent, invasive and destructive activities of trawlers and large deep sea fishing vessels which pose a grave threat in all countries of Asia with particularly tragic results as in Vietnam.

We also OPPOSE vehemently the destruction of fishery ecosystems by environmentally intolerable acts such as felling of mangrove forests, removal of sea-grass beds and destruction of coral reefs, and the dumping of nuclear, industrial and domestic wastes in seas, lakes and lagoons as we observed in our visits to Trang and Songkla in Thailand.

We call upon all concerned to immediately **CEASE AND DESIST** in the conduct of such selfish and destructive activities.

We strongly **URGE** our governments to adopt, pursue and strictly implement policies, law and regulations for management and control of fishing resources for the benefit of the fishing communities which will enable us to build a sustainable system of production in the fisheries sector while safeguarding our traditional livelihood and preserving our national heritage.

### 3. The Contributions of Small Fisherfolk

We **DEMAND** acknowledgment of the importance and contribution of the marine and inland fisherfolk in Asia to their national economies.

We therefore **PROTEST** the continuing marginalization and disentanglement of small fisherfolk in the countries of Asia and **URGE** all to join Asian fisherfolk in our struggles against oppression, injustices and denial of basic human rights.

### 4. Large-Scale Fishing

Considering the destructive and exhaustive results of large scale fishing in Asia by big capitalists fishers, we **DEMAND** a ban of trawling and purse-seining within territorial waters; a ban on the use of fishing gear which indiscriminately destroys all forms of marine life.

We DEMAND the reduction and curtailment of large-scale fishing in order to alleviate existing pressure on endangered fishery ecosystems and in order to sustain life in seas and inland waters.

#### 5. Rights of Fisherfolk

We CALL UPON the concerned authorities and all peoples of Asian countries to acknowledge and respect all human rights of fishworkers, small fisherfolk and their communities. Specifically, we DEMAND recognition and respect of Asian fisherfolk communities' right to manage and control their fishing lands and fishery resources; their right to such resources; their right to knowledge, facilities and technologies of their nation; their right to develop their production and work and their right to preserve and develop their cultural life.

We specifically URGE all concerned to respect the right of Asiann fisherfolk to organise themselves to assert, secure and realize the above rights.

#### 6. Governmental Agreements and Concessions

We RAISE OUR VOICE against bilateral agreements and concessions entered into by our governments whereby the interests of large-scale capitalist fishers - local and foreign - are given priority over the needs and interests of small fisherfolk and which are extremely detrimental to

the economy and the environment of our countries.

We DEMAND that such agreements and concessions be reviewed, abrogated and abolished forthwith.

We also DEMAND that no such agreements be made in the future without the fullest participation of the fisherfolk who are most vitally affected by such agreements.

#### 7. Fishworkers on Large Fishing-Vessels

We CALL ATTENTION to the grave and continuing violations of human rights of fishworkers on large fishing vessels.

We DEMAND protection of the rights of fishworkers on fishing vessels; respect for their right to work; and abolition of all forms of wage slavery on fishing vessels.

In the case of illegal fishing by such vessels we DEMAND that the captains and owners of such vessels (as well as their governments) be held responsible and dealt with accordingly instead of repressive action being taken against the innocent fishworkers.

## 8 APPEAL

In conclusion, we URGE the small fisherfolk of Asia to unite together to protect their rights of survival, livelihood and culture and to join ranks with all other sections of people struggling against oppression, discrimination and injustice.

We APPEAL to the peoples of Asia to make common cause with Asian fisherfolk in their struggles for sustainability and justice.

(The above Songkla Statement was drafted by the Asian fisherfolk attending the Fifth Asian Fisherfolk Consultation at Songkla, Thailand (January 27-31, 1992) and was adopted by consensus by all participants at the Consultation on January 31, 1992.)



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