

# On 25 Years of ICSF

On the occasion of its 25th anniversary, ICSF invited its members, and well-wishers to respond to the following two questions:

- 1) What is your perception of the work of ICSF over the years?
- 2) In the coming years, how do you think ICSF should evolve? What should be the focus of its work?

We would like to thank all those who took the time to respond in such constructive ways, and we are committed to using the suggestions and feedback received for internal decisionmaking. Some excerpts from the extremely useful and thought-provoking responses we have received are compiled in this supplement, to be shared with our wider readership.

### ***On the work of ICSF:***

ICSF has been a crucial force in challenging international fishing policy and has been instrumental in presenting a formal arena of debate for all fishing industry stakeholders, more so for a forgotten majority... Through the years, *SAMUDRA Report* has become the only truly thought-provoking journal for an international fishing industry audience and has evolved as a great global network for many without a larger voice. For fish harvester organization leaders throughout the world, *SAMUDRA Report* is a breath

of fresh air, filled with arguments and ideas developed elsewhere in the world.

### ***On how ICSF should evolve:***

ICSF could play a role as a facilitator organization, with the aim of regrouping international harvester and fishworker organizations under one roof in a federation of sorts.

—Christian Brun (christian@mfu-upm.com)  
Executive Secretary, Maritime Fishermen's Union (MFU), Canada



**On the work of ICSF:**

In the first years, it was a bit like ICSF was the lone voice in the desert, being the only organization promoting small-scale fisheries as a way of life and a positive model of development. In those days, it was difficult to conceive that one day, people would regard small-scale fisheries as having the characteristics that make them, in most cases, a more sustainable model of development. And yet, this is now happening, mainly thanks to the work, faith and commitment of ICSF!

I particularly appreciate the work done by ICSF on women in fisheries and labour conditions.

**On how ICSF should evolve:**

ICSF's work could be strengthened in Africa. The issues of climate change, trade and youth in small-scale fisheries need to be addressed. Also important is to focus on the development of small-scale tuna fisheries, and whether, and how, to interact with regional management organizations.

—Béatrice Gorez (cfa.cape@scarlet.be)  
Co-ordinator, Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA)



**On the work of ICSF:**

I have been impressed by the work of ICSF as a broad network focused on fishworkers and fishing communities, especially those involved in small-scale fisheries. The adoption of a human-rights-based approach and the attention being paid to gender issues are recognized as very important developments. The communication work through the ICSF website and publications is very valuable.

**On how ICSF should evolve:**

As online access continues to grow in the developing world, further developing the ICSF website as a resource and perhaps also developing communications through popular social media like Facebook might be something to think about as ways of potentially involving more communities in the network.

ICSF could consider developing its expertise on climate change adaptation (CCA) and fishing communities, and developing networks with other agencies involved in CCA and fisheries...

—Frank Elvey (franke@oxfam.org.hk)  
Regional Manager, Oxfam Hong Kong Archipelagic Southeast Asia Team, Oxfam Hong Kong



**On the work of ICSF:**

In our development work, we find that ICSF is an organization from whom we get useful information and sound advice. Apart from the wide range of information provided, we appreciate the work that ICSF is doing in investigating, discussing and involving partners in issues that may negatively impact fishing communities, like the

establishment of marine protected areas (MPAs), red listing of certain species, tourism, etc. In this way, ICSF manages to present a more diverse picture and to assist in finding solutions. ICSF seems to not only have the knowledge and sound attitude to work on the ground, but also be an active and important player in international forums, promoting the interests of small-scale fishing communities.

**On how ICSF should evolve:**

The role of ICSF is unique, and we hope it will continue its work as it is doing now.

—Brit R Ø Fisknes (brit.fisknes@norad.no)  
Senior Adviser,  
Department for Private Sector Development and the Environment,  
Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (NORAD)



**On the work of ICSF:**

ICSF has been remarkable in promoting fisherfolk's rights and obligations, and has been gaining greater attention and support from both developing and developed countries, from international organizations and local organizations, including local communities...

**On how ICSF should evolve:**

ICSF should consider getting involved in helping fisherfolk cope with issues related to climate change.

—Suseno Sukoyono (ssn\_id@yahoo.com)  
Minister's Adviser on Economic, Social and Cultural Affairs,  
Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, Indonesia



**On the work of ICSF:**

I feel that ICSF has not been engaged closely enough with general development sector non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development actors (including non-fishery ministries in government) to bring tangible



social and economic development benefits to fishing-dependent communities that could arise from outside the sector. ICSF has been effective because it has maintained good relationships with all stakeholders in the fishery sector. The campaigns on rights, access, equitable markets, etc. have all been useful and often effective vehicles for assisting the social and cultural development of fishing communities, but these have usually been focused on sectoral entry points, when sometimes the problems and solutions lie beyond the sector.

In the more technical routes towards policy reform, perhaps the most effective actions have been those around resolving conservation interests clashing with fishing ones around MPAs, and in bringing the human rights agenda to the fore in fisheries development circles.

There have been some really useful information and support services from ICSF over the years—the work on



legal conventions, on right to decent work, on women's rights, for example. I feel there is an opportunity for more practical substance to go with the high visibility you've achieved through meetings, through publications, and through issuing declarations. This role as a 'bridge and broker' organization between fishing communities and global donors and international agencies could be used more directly to assist local and national NGOs to gain access to international funding networks to take forward practical measures to address the social and political issues that ICSF so effectively highlights at the global level.

I also feel sometimes that ICSF has been most effective in developing and maintaining links with the more savvy and globalized end of the 'grassroots' fishing communities. Also, the voices heard through ICSF are those of the traditional fishing hierarchies—and often the 'elders' in such communities. This is partly a strength but it leaves large numbers of the poor disenfranchised.

...the good relations you have with the FAO Fisheries Division are a strength but they may also mean that it is difficult to hold FAO to account, to challenge them to uphold

their mission, values and commitments. Having said this, it's good to see small-scale fisheries and human rights still on the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) agenda four years after it was introduced, and three years after the small-scale fisheries meeting in Bangkok.

#### **On how ICSF should evolve:**

I get the sense that some of your efforts are focused on the small-scale fishers of developed economies, and they are some of your more visible, vocal and effective champions. While I recognize that these communities face issues of marginalization, battles for rights, cultural survival and economic hardship, there is a risk that this dilutes the resources you have to address the even greater challenges of assisting fishworkers battling for survival and autonomy in the context of weak or hostile States and the harsh daily realities of food insecurity. If your focus was on poverty and hunger in the context of fisheries, and on the least developed countries, then you might be even more effective in bringing these fishworkers to the attention of national and international policy influencers and funders.

I think the regional consultations and resultant declarations and the engagement in high-level meetings such as COFI have their place, and perhaps this is your area of comparative advantage, but I sense that more direct support to communities and their representatives who are struggling would add to the impact of ICSF. For this, partnership with development NGOs—for example, Oxfam, CARE—would be advantageous.

Something else that you could do is to develop a conscious focus on youth in fisheries.

As for new issues, it is good to see ICSF beginning to engage in the climate change arena. The focus here should be on getting fair allocation of adaptation funds by highlighting the actual and potential impacts of climate change on fisheries.

—Edward Allison (E.Allison@cgiar.org)  
Principal Scientist, Policy, Economics and Social Science,  
The WorldFish Centre, Penang, Malaysia



#### **On the work of ICSF:**

ICSF is an unusual combination of an honest intellectual leader that has an ideology that it pursues sincerely, forthrightly and with a balance of strength and diplomacy. I perceive that it does not compromise its principal aim of supporting the human rights of small-scale fishworkers while it navigates through the complexity of authorities and interests that it must influence and engage with to achieve this. At the same time, it does not objectify and thereby undermine the dignity of the people whose cause it supports...

Of all the groups that I have seen engage in the global formal fisheries governance processes, including conservation and industry groups, ICSF stands out as one

that is thorough, steady in its own interests and still walks the line between never being captured by the processes it joins in, nor alienating in its approach. ICSF is one of the most respected civil society groups engaging in FAO events.

**On how ICSF should evolve:**

ICSF should do more on women in supply chains and more on the at-sea conditions of men in fisheries, including the rights of migrant ship workers.

The possible outreach for ICSF and its products could be even further improved and enhanced.

ICSF should develop a strategy for outreach that serves its needs, and not rush blindly into such areas as social networking on the Internet. Generational engagement should be considered in the mix of outreach strategies as the young need to be aware of the issues which are at the heart of ICSF's mission.

—Meryl Williams (meryljwilliams@gmail.com)  
Specialist in Fisheries,  
Aquaculture and Natural Resource Management, Australia



**WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS !**



**On the work of ICSF:**

ICSF has undoubtedly had considerable influence on the global fisheries discourse...The organization has contributed very significantly towards shaping the power that the small-scale fisheries sector has internationally through creating opportunities for men and women fishworkers' voices to be heard.

**On how ICSF should evolve:**

ICSF needs to continue to play a role as a critical voice, providing the research, training, information and advocacy support that will enable men and women fishworker leaders at the national level to develop the skills required to provide leadership in this challenging context. Additional efforts

need to be undertaken to integrate fishworkers' rights, particularly those of women fishworkers, with other sectoral policies.

One of the key strengths of ICSF has been its history of collective voluntarism, located in the personal and political commitments of its members. Additional efforts should be invested in retaining this aspect of the organization and sharing this ethos with a new layer of members, as this sort of collective is increasingly rare but more critical than ever.

—Jackie Sunde (jsunde@telkomsa.net)  
Member, ICSF, South Africa



**On the work of ICSF:**

In my engagements with both National Fisheries Solidarity (NAFSO), my own local organization in Sri Lanka, and with the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), I have found ICSF playing a very important and vital role for small-scale fisheries through international advocacy.

**On how ICSF should evolve:**

The situation of small-scale fisheries is degrading day by day. The protection of small-scale fisheries is a responsibility for all. However, small-scale fishers alone are not in a position to defend their rights. So, ICSF should continue working to bring small-scale fisheries organizations together to work collectively, and provide information and feed the movements that are fighting to defend the rights of small-scale fisheries. The human-rights-based approach in small-scale fisheries should be strengthened through strong arguments and facts. Most importantly, and on a high priority basis, ICSF could work for the formulation of an international instrument for small-scale fisheries by bringing together all concerned parties. The most effective and scientific instrument should be formulated within a short period of time, and ICSF could lead the process. We see this as the most important need following the 29th session of COFI. We hope ICSF will continue its support to fishworkers through information sharing and education.

—Herman Kumara (hermankumara@gmail.com)  
General Secretary, World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), Sri Lanka



**On the work of ICSF:**

ICSF has developed debates and studies on various aspects related to artisanal fisheries, including about access to resources, working conditions, the role of women in fisheries, conflicts with industrial fisheries, child labour, workers' rights, international trade in fishery products and MPAs.

**On how ICSF should evolve:**

ICSF should focus on climate change, the rights of

communities to access resources, and the proposal for an international instrument on small-scale fisheries.

—Juan Carlos Sueiro (jcsueiro@cooperacion.org.pe)  
Member, ICSF, Peru



### **On the work of ICSF:**

Being aware of the value of women's role, generally invisible and un(der)-valued in the world of fisheries, ICSF played a significant role in strengthening this voice of women through its women in fisheries (WIF) programme.

The programme facilitated the direct linkages and interaction of women of fishing communities, researchers, policymakers and fishworker leaders through involving them in participatory field studies, workshops, conferences, documentation building, etc. Most challenging were the debates on a feminist and gender perspective of fisheries, which contributed to the awareness of women of fishing communities, and encouraged them to organize and speak out their views and concerns.

The WIF programme contributed significantly to the visibility and valorization of women's role in fisheries and fishing communities. The 'Shared Agenda' developed at the international workshop titled "Recasting the Net: Defining a Gender Agenda for Sustaining Life and Livelihood in Fishing Communities", which took place in India last year, is a great achievement and also unique in its participatory character and depth of issues. For ICSF, it is now a challenge to take this agenda and discourse forward and see that they will not disappear.

In my perception, it is essential for the future existence and work of ICSF to expand, deepen and nourish its relationship with organizations of people whose life and livelihood depend on small-scale and artisanal fisheries. The most successful programmes of ICSF have been those that have involved national ground work building up to the international level.

### **On how ICSF should evolve:**

In most regions, ICSF is not present at all, particularly in eastern Europe, Middle East and large parts of Africa. Building regional networks would strengthen ICSF, as it would ensure direct links with the daily realities, struggles and aspirations of fishworkers, the real people. This would require more creative ways of communication at the international level using information technology, although face-to-face communication remains most effective. With shrinking donor aid for the international programme, there is a need to explore creative ways to mobilize resources. Creativity always has been a strength of the network!

—Cornelie Quist (cornelie.quist@gmail.com)  
Member, ICSF, The Netherlands



### **On the work of ICSF:**

It is chronically difficult to construct simple causal chains between events and developments in complex systems. It is thus difficult to claim responsibility for developments for one actor or organization...

The deepness of the fisheries crisis, and ICSF's consistent voice, together with others, have contributed to a search for alternatives to unsustainable industrial and often high-impact fisheries.

ICSF did not have the research machinery for a more systematic assessment of the true role of small-scale fisheries to global production, income, food security, etc., but its reports raised the motivation to do that on a systematic basis.

### **On how ICSF should evolve:**

The Internet offers better opportunities today for building up systematic datasets which allow us to confront intuition and preconceived ideas with evidence to assess whether the basis of decisionmaking—as individuals, groups, countries—is solid. ICSF should push for that more systematically. It would add value to its own work; instead of having a large series of case studies, individual case studies would bring to life a bigger global picture and lend additional weight to the thinking about the future of fisheries in different ways (including by the fishers themselves). Those repositories should be checked for quality and made available in the public domain to encourage more analysis and research on small-scale fisheries as social systems that have to cope with a high degree of market globalization and climate change.

—Cornelia Nauen (cnauen@telenet.be)  
Principal Policy Officer, International Co-operation,  
Research Directorate General, European Commission





**On the work of ICSF:**

ICSF seems to be well-known and respected by international bodies like FAO and its inputs have, for example, been taken up in FAO papers. Good publications have been elaborated and widely spread. ICSF collaborates with a large network of fisher organizations worldwide, which makes it possible to exchange ideas and strategies on a larger scale.

ICSF seems to have made very good information and advocacy work over the years. It has always been a valuable partner to small-scale fishers who would not have had the opportunity otherwise to make their voices heard.

**On how ICSF should evolve:**

Considering the upcoming food crisis, it might be interesting for ICSF to work with networks on the food-security sector for better synergies and a stronger political impact.

—Christine Kögel (Christine.Koegel@misereor.de) and  
Alexa Emundts (Alexa.Emundts@misereor.de)  
MISEREOR, Germany



**On the work of ICSF:**

I fully appreciate the activities of ICSF in representing the voices of small-scale fishers and fish farmers, especially through its publications and newsletters such as *SAMUDRA Report* as well as through its participation in relevant meetings, including those of COFI, and conferences and regional workshops on small-scale fisheries. The current way of working together with the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) and the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF) seems for me to be very efficient and appropriate in order to integrate and strengthen the voices of small-scale fishers and fish farmers into one big voice.

**On how ICSF should evolve:**

While ICSF should continue evolving as an international, sophisticated and well-established NGO, it should, at the same time, keep up the highest level of credibility and direct links to fishers and fish farmers.

—Hiromoto Watanabe (Hiromoto.Watanabe@fao.org)  
Senior Fisheries Officer, Policy, Economics and Institutions (FIPI),  
FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department



**On the work of ICSF:**

The most important achievement of ICSF has been to give a voice to small-scale fishworkers around the globe, but especially those from the South. This has been easier to achieve in those countries and situations where there have been some forms of local or national organizations of fishworkers.

In countries where organizations among fishworkers are weak or primarily confined to the local level, ICSF's outreach

and influence is likely more limited. On the other hand, these situations would be a challenge for any development-oriented organization.

ICSF has been able to successfully lobby for specific small-scale fishworkers-related provisions in various international instruments, both of the soft voluntary nature and binding agreement types, for example, FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, and the ILO Work in Fishing Convention. International provisions for giving small-scale fisheries preferential access to their traditional fishing grounds are likely a direct outcome of ICSF's lobbying work. The value of such provisions depends on whether or not they are taken up in national laws and policies. There is evidence that they have been taken on board because of a combination of lobbying by national fishworkers and the existence of these provisions in international instruments.

*SAMUDRA Report*, ICSF's widely read flagship publication, takes a nice middle ground between academic-style technical articles and magazine-style news items on small-scale fisheries-related issues.

There can be little doubt that ICSF has become a widely consulted source of information on small-scale fisheries.



The Internet has greatly enhanced ICSF's outreach and influence. It has given strength to that part of ICSF's work in which it excels most, namely, information gathering and sharing.

In respect of the monitoring of small-scale fisheries developments, ICSF's approach is anecdotal rather than based on data-rich analyses of trends. This is an area where ICSF could perhaps explore novel ways to feel the pulse of small-scale fishing communities through Web-based methods and relying on its extensive network.

If ICSF did not exist, it would need to be set up speedily because its varied functions are critical for the support of small-scale fisheries around the globe, especially in developing countries.

**On how ICSF should evolve:**

ICSF has developed into a highly professional organization from an initial informal setup strongly based on volunteerism. While high levels of commitment continue to be important for ICSF's widespread network, the increasing professionalism is overall a positive development that needs to be fostered and maintained in order for ICSF to continue its mission in a more diverse and competitive world. In this context, fund raising will be critical as salaries of skilled staff are on the rise everywhere, and ICSF cannot afford to fall back on the quality and number of its skilled secretariat staff, and its network of skilled collaborators; in fact, it should aim at, in my view, increasing its staff level to expand its activities in two areas in particular: (i) monitoring of trends in small-scale fisheries, and (ii) capacity development, especially the strengthening of fishworkers' organizations, including leadership training.

—Rolf Willmann (rolf.willmann@fao.org)  
Senior Fishery Planning Officer, Policy, Economics and Institutions (FIPI), FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department



and policy dialogues. ICSF will hopefully also maintain its firm but humble style, its determined and creative work ethics in a highly committed spirit of solidarity. I would much appreciate a continuing and growing commitment to supporting the struggles of small-scale fishers (who are often not as well-organized or articulate as fishworkers) against oppression, exploitation and marginalization in these times of expanding globalization, neoliberalism and one-sided focus on conservation and climate issues, sometimes used with ulterior motives to 'legitimize' interventions to the detriment of the rights of fisherfolk. Thematically, I feel it is important to continue to highlight the dichotomies of positive and negative impacts of different forms of aquaculture...

Geographically, I would highly appreciate continued and intensified focus on southern and eastern Africa.

—Ian Bryceson (ian.bryceson@umb.no)  
Department of International Environment and Development Studies, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Norway

**On the work of ICSF:**

ICSF has occupied a special niche in the world of small-scale fisheries in the last 25 years. When it was formed in 1986, some of us hoped that ICSF should become a key reference point in the expanding fishery civil society space. This hope has been realized, not due to funds, not due to a large organizational structure. This was possible because of the huge degree of passionate and voluntary work offered by a large network of persons from around the globe, combined with a small, committed and efficient secretariat.

**On how ICSF should evolve:**

ICSF should continue on the same trajectory, keeping in mind the new realities which emerge in small-scale fisheries and coastal and inland fishing communities. The ability to respond effectively; to mould global opinion on issues affecting the sector; to raise human capacity; to search for alternatives and to be always on a learning mode are good attributes to strive towards.

—John Kurien (kurien.john@gmail.com)  
Member, ICSF, India

**On the work of ICSF:**

When I look back 25 years to when all those fishworkers and supporters gathered in Rome at Piatsa Navona, demonstrating to prove that they existed and needed recognition, I have mixed feelings today.

At the international level, ICSF was totally committed and largely successful to see that the artisanal fishers retained their visibility and constructively related to multilateral international processes to safeguard their rights. From that point of view, I feel that the supporters of the fishworkers in Rome stood by their commitment to

**On the work of ICSF:**

I have no hesitation in saying that ICSF is an incredibly important organization for fisherfolk (both fishworkers and small-scale fishers). Your roots in supporting the struggles of fisherfolk in southern India have spread across the world to become genuinely international, and your engagement in international debates has had an impressive level of influence. Considering your modest finances and physical facilities, the explanation for this must be in your clear ideas and in your very strong sense of commitment.

**On how ICSF should evolve:**

ICSF will hopefully continue its dedicated and effective work to support the struggles of fisherfolk throughout the world, and engage actively in international debates





fishworkers when it was decided that while the fishworkers should build up their organizations to defend their rights at the national level, the supporters, who subsequently created ICSF, would provide the backup with international linkages and conceptual inputs to strengthen the cause of artisanal fishers.

I think that this inter-organizational role that ICSF has successfully been able to play between governmental structures and fishworker organizations has been crucial to these achievements. The fact that ICSF members remained faithful to their self-imposed mandate and were represented by secretaries and a secretariat that were both competent, committed and functioned as a team, has also been key to this.

As a concept, the collective of individuals has also not only survived but has grown and got strengthened by capable members who joined in, happy to pitch in with the democratic philosophy, transparency and true spirit of voluntarism. The spirit of debate and agreement to disagree and patiently wait until others are convinced has led to the majority of members remaining together, maturing in perspective and not being swayed away by jumping on mainstream bandwagons.

But why did I commence by saying I have “mixed feelings”? I should probably be excited that so much has happened in these 25 years vis-a-vis small-scale fisheries.

Yes, much has probably happened, but too late, in my assessment. Much has indeed happened, not all of which has been positive. The artisanal fishery itself has lost much of its selectivity; it has become hugely capital-intensive; it has become hugely dependent on non-renewable fuel; the coastal zone is up for grabs with neoliberal policies getting the better of the day; some of the fishworker organizations in parts of the world seem to have lost the interaction with the base; and the mass-based concept has not matured into democratic decision-making structures at local levels that can pave the way for local fisheries management. With more capital requirements in fisheries, there has been an appearance and progressive increase in dowries in marriage, with the result that the girl child begins to be seen as a liability, and population data reveals that there is a fall in the female sex ratio in the coastal communities in India since the 2001 census. Violence on women in the fishing communities is also on the increase.

#### **On how ICSF should evolve:**

It is high time for us to put our eggs in the basket of alternatives, and strengthen local communities with different livelihood options, all in the belief that another world is possible.

—Nalini Nayak (nalini.nayak@gmail.com)  
Member, ICSF, India

