

INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS

Round the globe, modern development strategies-oriented as they are primarily towards enhancing production- have given rise to serious problems of ecological sustainability and social justice. Invariably, these result in the unequal distribution and overexploitation of the earth's resources. This process has been particularly intense in the fisheries sector.

The past 40 years have seen major technological development which have enhanced the supply of fish and increased trade in fishery products the world over. However, the pressures these have brought to bear on the fishery have in some areas pushed it to the point of collapse.

Problems like deforestation and pollution, while threatening the biosphere, also affect the riverine, lacustrine and marine zones as well as the livelihood of communities dependent on them.

Moreover, there have been changes in ownership patterns prompted by the market economy. These, along with other institutional factors, have constrained equitable access to fishery resources and accelerated the rates of exploitation.

Consequently, different regions of the world witness the social and economic marginalization of fishworkers-men, women and children whose work and livelihood depend on fishery-related activities, whether these lie in the sphere of harvesting, processing or marketing.

Compounding this problem is the absence or inadequacy of forums to focus on these issues and thus enable them to fairly influence policy-making.

These were the prime motivating factors behind the International Conference of Fishworkers and their Supporters held in Rome in 1984. This Conference -principally a Third World initiative was attended by fishworkers and their supporters from around world.

The Conference addressed the question of the marginalization of fishworkers from the policymaking and planning processes at the regional and global levels. It stressed the need for creating a forum to:

- ☐ monitor issues that have relevance to the life and livelihood of fishworkers

- ☐ disseminate information especially amongst fisherfolk
- ☐ prepare guidelines for programmes that would underscore just, participatory and sustainable fisheries development and management.

It was against this broader background and specifically in pursuit of these objectives that the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) was formed in Trivandrum, India, in 1986.

The Collective is a global, multi-faceted network of community organizers, teachers, technicians, researchers and scientists. The common factor which links the members is their close association with fishworkers' organizations in their respective areas of work.

Activities

The activities of the Collective fall broadly four heads.

- ☐ Monitoring and research
- ☐ Exchange and training
- ☐ Campaigns and action programmes
- ☐ Communications.

Monitoring and research

The Collective monitors the impact of technology, legislation and aid programmes on small-scale fishworkers. Other areas of concern include the conditions of work and life in the sector, the role of women in fisheries, the utilization of coastal zones, the socio-economic impact of modern aquaculture practices on fisherfolk and issues related to the degradation of the working environment. An important dimension of this area of activity is the emphasis placed on participatory involvement of the fishworkers themselves.

Two studies have already been completed under this program: one on the status of fishworkers in Latin America, and the other on the role of fishing legislation in resolving coastal conflicts in selected Asian countries.

Ongoing research deals with the impact of aquaculture on fisherfolk, the changing product relations in artisanal fisheries in West Africa, and the conditions of fishworkers on distant water vessels in Asia.

Exchange and training

The main aim of the exchange and training program is to facilitate a South-South dialogue with a view to selectively reducing dependence on the developed countries in matters relating to technology and organization. This is achieved through the exchange of experience and know-how among Third World fishworkers themselves and between fishworkers and scientists.

This, however, does not preclude a South-North dialogue which is also encouraged to increase solidarity among fishworkers and their supporters.

Many such exchange programmes, stressing people-to-people transfer of technology and knowledge, have already been undertaken by the Collective in Asia, Africa, Canada and Latin America. Training programmes have also been conducted for rural animators in fishing communities in Africa and Latin America.

Campaigns and action programs

These are essentially meant to draw attention to processes that have an adverse impact on the fishworkers' access to resources, working conditions and livelihood. Towards this end, the Collective has initiated efforts in several directions.

To begin with, the Collective attempts to bring to the notice of the international community and the fishworkers in developing countries the implications of bilateral and multilateral fishery agreements.

The Collective has also actively campaigned to emphasize the inequality in the negotiations between the European Economic Community and the African, Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) countries in respect of the Lome Accord agreements in fisheries. The adverse impact of this Accord on the small-scale sector in the ACP countries has been highlighted on an international scale.

Furthermore, the Collective has brought to public notice the unfair trading practices of private fishing equipment manufacturing companies in certain regions of the world.

Plans for future programmes include lobbying within the International Labour Organization to get it to acknowledge the position of small-scale fishworkers vis-à-vis their rights to livelihood, organizations and social welfare. The Collective intends to participate in the "Earth Summit" of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992, and to associate with the fol-

low-up programmes. Also on the larger agenda is the development of a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between the aquatic environment and the biosphere.

Communications

In aiming to disseminate information on its activities and in order to facilitate dialogue between members, the Collective brings out several publications. There are published under the generic title, SAMUDRA, which means "ocean" in many Asian languages.

There are two regular publications: the SAMUDRA Report, meant for a wider and more general audience, and the SAMUDRA Newsletter whose circulations is confined to members.

Also published is a SAMUDRA series of Monographs/Dossiers. There are either detailed studies on activities identified for research or other compilations and reports commissioned by the Collective.

Perspective for the future

For far too long fishworkers have been the victims of a skewed process of development which has pushed them to the periphery of the society, particularly in the developing countries. This needs to be changed. With this goal in sight, the Collective.

recognizes

above all else the fishworkers right to livelihood which has been and continues to be threatened by inappropriate technological developments, environment damage and inequitable international agreements on fishing;

declares

its support for greater people-to-people contact and exchange which will spread knowledge and build up solidarity, especially among fishworkers in developing countries.

advocates

greater unity between the small-scale and the industrial fishworkers in the developing countries for the advancement of their common welfare;

asserts

the need for fishworkers and their supporters to relate more closely with other deprived people whose survival is also threatened by technological changes, institutional factors and environmental damage;

stresses

the pivotal role that women play in the adoption of a nurturing relation with nature, instead of the one that currently exists; and

strives

to contribute to the evolution of a just and participatory development process which alone will be economically and environmentally sustainable into the future.

As beacons of the sea, fishworkers have not only a singular role but also a designated responsibility in realizing these objectives. To them, the Collective commits its unfailing support.

Structure

The Collective has both regular and associate members from all the continents. It is mandatory that three-quarters of the membership be from the developing countries. The members are admitted on their personal capacities and do not formally represent their respective nations or organizations. Women comprise a fifth of the present membership.

The Collective has three constituent bodies. These are:

- The General Body, which comprises the entire membership, holds all the powers to fulfil Collective's objectives.
- The Animation Team, appointed by the General Body from among the regular members a tenure of 3 years, is the core body which the mandate to manage and represent the Collective.
- The Secretariat, headed by an Executive Secretary, is responsible for carrying out all the decisions of the Animation Team.

The ICSF is registered as an International organization in Geneva, Switzerland. It has an office in Brussels, Belgium. The Program Co-ordination Centre (the Secretariat) is situated in Madras, India. The regular publications are brought from Valparaiso, Chile. □