

Net worth

An Internet and e-mail workshop held by ICSF in Lima, Peru, between 27 and 29 May 1997, generated tremendous enthusiasm

The Workshop on Electronic Communication and Internet was held in Lima, Peru, from 27 to 29 May 1997 at the Catholic University of Lima. About 20 participants from FIUPAP, Peru; CONAPACH and FETRINECH, Chile; FENACOPEC, Ecuador; Sindicato de Obreros Maritimos Unificados, Argentina; and Instituto Terramar and Centro Josue de Castro, Brazil, took part in the workshop.

James Smith was the co-ordinator of the workshop, and Satish Babu from the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies, India, was the principal resource person.

The original idea for conducting the workshop arose at ICSF's Cebu conference in June 1994 and came from the Latin American fish workers' organizations. The idea fitted in with ICSF's communications programme and aimed to:

- set up a bulletin board service (BBS) to improve communications between fishworkers' organizations and NGOs;
- facilitate discussion forums (on fisheries agreements, fishing technologies, fisheries legislation, fleet movements, status of stocks, struggles of fishworkers, reports on workshops and consultations, organizational strategies, regional networks, etc.);
- provide information on ICSF programmes and on fishworkers' organizations in the South (in English, French and Spanish); and
- set up a central repository of information on fisheries and fishworkers' issues.

The objectives of the Lima workshop were to:

- familiarize fishworkers' organizations and supporting NGOs in Latin America with the basic electronic communications technologies required for promoting better information access and worldwide exchanges;
- launch a networking operation using electronic communication in order to facilitate interaction between fishworkers' organizations and NGOs, and to help the latter participate more fully in ICSF programmes; and
- help ICSF familiarize itself with current fisheries issues in Latin America.

The workshop was held in collaboration with the Huayuna Institute which, among other things, works with the artisanal fishermen at the community level in Pisco, Peru. Their co-operation was invaluable in the success of the workshop. Hernan Peralta presented a paper on the scope of networking among the Latin American fishworker organizations, and Sebastian Mathew made a presentation on NGOs and the FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

More networking

The workshop identified three main areas for greater networking at the regional level: degradation of the coastal environment, including the destructive impact of sea lions on artisanal fishing, incursion of foreign fishing fleets into the EEZs, and aspects of safety at sea. At the end of the workshop, a committee, comprising Sammy Nafez from Centro Josue de Castro, Brazil, Manuel Milla from

FIUPAP, Peru, Pedro Avendano from CONAPACH, Chile, Guillermo Risco from FETRINECH and Geraldo Salazar from FENACOPEC, Ecuador, was formed to discuss follow-up programmes under the co-ordination of James Smith.

On the first day of the workshop, a meeting was held to discuss the areas of networking in Latin America. The discussion was begun by the Secretary General of FIUPAP. He spoke about the membership structure of FIUPAP which comprises marine, riverine and lake fishers. The absence of any social security system in Peru for fishermen was mentioned. Pollution of the coastal waters and destruction of nets and fish by sea lions are major issues of concern, according to the Secretary General. The organization is concerned about the introduction of a permit system and wants open-access regimes for artisanal fishermen. It is further concerned about marketing problems and is interested in using the services of professionals like engineers and economists. It is also lobbying the government for hospitals and schools in fishing communities.

Guillermo Risco of FETRINECH, Chile, wanted fishers to be trained in resource management. He cautioned against the deepening of social inequality in Chile which, in some cases, has led to a loss of faith in the union movement. When democracy came to Chile, fishers expected a lot from the union movement, and disillusionment with the unions has now set in. The main problem in Chilean waters is the lack of an effective monitoring, control and surveillance mechanism to prevent indiscriminate fishing by foreign vessels. Internet networking can contribute to a greater dialogue between the artisanal and industrial unions, which could further contribute to greater solidarity between them.

The conditions of work of industrial fishworkers has worsened in the recent past, said Risco. Fishermen are expected to put in 18 hours of work a day. Although the retirement age in fisheries is 65, there is no single crew member in Chile who is above 50. In most cases, the crew member is burnt out by 40 or 45. Risco lamented the fact that everything is focused mainly on

issues of production. He said fishers have to do something together to defend their national heritage and, towards this end, he said, it is important to exchange experiences. In this context, he found the idea of e-mail networking quite useful.

The conditions in Peruvian industrial fisheries have deteriorated in the 1990s, said Hernan Peralta. Wages have been cut by 25 per cent and industrial fishers are now demoralised. Compared to the Peruvian fishworkers in the industrial sector, the Chileans have much better conditions of work because of better legislation, said Peralta.

Humberto Mella from CONAPACH was concerned that fishers no longer necessarily have a say in fisheries policies in Chile. The decisions are made in big fish importing countries like Japan. Globalization has complicated matters and, therefore, it is necessary to have the involvement of professionals to run fishers' organizations. Fishers can not manage things by themselves anymore. Mella, however, wanted mutual understanding between fishers' organizations and professionals.

Mella sympathized with the Peruvian fishworkers and mentioned the threat Chileans face from sea lions. He wanted technical studies to document the damages caused by sea lions to artisanal fisheries.

Although expressing his happiness at the invitation extended to industrial fishers from Chile to this workshop, Mella did not agree that their conditions are all that bad, as made out by Risco. In Chile, the industrial fishers are entitled to pensions and they also participate in artisanal fisheries on retirement. While the artisanal fishers fish for survival, the industrial fishers fish for money, he said. He was not for any collaborative arrangement between the artisanal and industrial fishers.

Regional arrangements

He believed regional arrangements for artisanal fishers could work. He was keen on having an association of artisanal fishers at the Latin American level. He wanted to guarantee the future of fishers and warned that time is running out. He

was critical about the government and said that its interest in the sector is limited by what it can get in return.

Mella touched upon the five-mile limit issue in Chile, which is a bone of contention between the artisanal and industrial fishers (industrial fishers are putting pressure on the government to permit them to fish within five miles from the coastline). He thinks the government policy basically benefits the industrial sector.

Given a chance, he feared, industrial fishers can overexploit all marine resources. The government, he said, should take a look at what is happening beyond five miles and keep industrial fisheries away from the shore. The distribution of marine resources, in any case, is unequal and favours only the industrial sector, he concluded,

Freddy Villon of FENACOPEC expressed surprise that the minimum size of the Chilean artisanal fleet is 50 GRT. In Ecuador, he said, artisanal vessels are 6 m in length, with or without OBMs. Currently, the artisanal fishing zone is four miles beyond the one-mile ecological zone from the shoreline.

The main struggle of artisanal fishers is to get it extended to eight miles. They are expecting to get a positive response from the government this year. Villon also supported the need for training of fishers in resource management.

In reply to Villon, Mella said large vessels are used mainly in waters south of Valparaiso, Chile, and they are used mainly because the sea conditions are very rough, whereas, in areas north of Valparaiso, the sea is not that rough and the average size of boats is less than 10 m in length. The frequency of accidents is very high in the Chilean artisanal fisheries (on the whole, there are 16,000 vessels in the artisanal sector in Chile), and about 100 deaths occur each year, mainly involving smaller boats.

Jorge Suarez of the Sindicato de Obreros Maritimos Unificados, Argentina was critical of the government and spoke about the Argentinean system where the workers deal directly with the *patronis*

(owners of fishing units). He said there is not much artisanal fishing in Argentina.

The workers are well looked after in Argentina, according to Suarez. They are also paid during off-seasons and are entitled to holidays. He said a regional organization will be of greater benefit if the intention is to function as a Latin American block. To a query on the impact of European Union fisheries agreement with Argentina, he replied that while the workers were opposed to the agreement, the *patronis* were in favour of signing it. The workers feel differently now, since foreign fishing has not adversely affected them.

As apparent at the evaluation meeting, the participants were positive about the outcome of the workshop and saw it as the beginning of professionalizing organizational management. They think the use of e-mail and the Internet would give them greater access to information which they consider will be useful to exert international pressure on fisheries issues. However, they felt that the duration of the workshop was too short.

In the discussion on the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the Latin American fishers' organizations seemed to understand the importance of policymaking and the significance of influencing such processes. It was observed that FAO-NGO collaboration was necessary to reinforce national commitments to various international processes.

The Chilean fishworker organizations felt that the implementation of the provisions of the United Nations Agreement on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks will be useful to prevent foreign fishing in their waters by the Koreans, Chinese and the Japanese. However, they do not see any enthusiasm on the part of their governments to ratify the Agreement.

Guidelines

The Code, they felt, could provide guidelines to national governments to prepare legislation. Fishers were keen to know why the Code was voluntary and how many countries participated in the development of the Code. There were

apprehensions about the absence of political will to implement fishing legislation.

They wanted to know if there are mechanisms to ensure greater compliance with legislation. It was ironic, one participant said that Japan has reasonably good legislation to protect its national waters, while their own vessels are illegally fishing in the EEZs of other countries. It was further observed that several countries have double standards when it comes to fisheries. The fishermen were also concerned that sufficient emphasis is not given to collection of data and timely publication of fisheries statistics.

The fishers' organizations observed that they should put pressure on their national governments to adopt the Code. They considered the Code to be of greater benefit to the fishworkers. They also wanted pressure to be exerted on the Latin American governments. The Latin American States, they said, are sensitive about their international image and if there is sufficient pressure from outside, the national governments will adopt the Code and ratify the UN Straddling Stocks Agreement. They wanted ICSF to persuade FAO to be more vigilant about the follow-up to the Code, and to influence national governments to ratify the UN Straddling Stocks Agreement.

The government policies have not changed a bit, said one participant, citing

the Peruvian example. The government has abandoned its fleet restructuring programmes and is apparently encouraging new and more powerful boats. The vessels that were removed under the programme are even illegally fishing in Peruvian waters. Liberal economic policies are influencing the decisions of the governments, said a fisherman.

Environmental regulations

Some participants also drew attention to the problems posed by environmental regulations in relation to sea lions, turtles and dolphins. They demanded some realistic application of these regulations, taking into consideration their life and livelihood interests.

This report was written by Satish Babu of the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS) India