

# **International Conference of Fishworkers, and their Supporters, Rome, July 4 – 8, 1984**

## **Report**

### **Outcomes of the conferences**

Two important General Conclusions Firstly, the participants raised that, despite various differences in the geographical, political social and Economic conditions of their countries, common factors operate on the world scene giving rise to the same problems ground the world. More particularly, they became aware that national, and other boundaries which must be overcome, as they perform the major function of masking the alignment of the real economic forces which shape the people's situation with the backing of political systems, state machinery and international organizations.

Still more importantly, the participants came to understand that the issue is not one of nationality not it is one of polarization between Third World interests on the one hand and First World interests on the other. Unless the problems are analysed in the Framework of a World capitalist system which into grants the economic sectors of all countries no effective solution can be found to improve the predicament of fishworkers.

Secondly, while many positive lessons can be drawn from the experience of various countries, the forms of workers' organizations and of collective action must take account of the concrete socio-political context in which they operate.

AT THE FUNCTIONAL LEVEL THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS EMERGED:

#### **1 The small-scale fishing sector has many inherent advantages**

'It is labor and local skill intensive

'It is capital and fuel saving (especially so when engines are combined with sailing devices);

'Its technology and mode of organization and management are well mastered by local fishing communities; the highly decentralised settlement pattern of coastal communities makes centralization, a pre-requisite for large-scale operations, both socially and politically undesirable;

'It does not give rise to large income disparities;

'It is usually well adapted to tropical aquatic eco-systems (characterized by numerous species in small quantities which are widely dispersed close to the shore) and,

when its techniques are capable of destroying grounds, local fishing communities frequently possess built-in mechanisms and rules for preventing overfishing

‘Far from being a stagnant sector, it has amply demonstrated in the last two decades that it is innovative and easily amenable to efficient improvements;

‘It is characterized by a high degree of flexibility

‘It is well integrated into small-scale marketing and distribution channels, which are highly efficient

Thus, the development of small-scale fisheries should not be advocated exclusively on social and welfare grounds. Small-scale fisheries should be supported for Economic, Technical ecological, organizational as well as social reasons.

**2** For the decades to come, so long as there is no rapid creation of alternative high-productivity job opportunities for the poor, there is no hope of alleviating the situation of the undernourished masses of many Third World countries unless techniques and modes of organization, which keep the prices of basic necessities low, are used. With its low cost of catching, preserving, transporting and distributing the fish, the small scale fishing sector is particularly suited to providing inexpensive proteins to the masses. More efforts should be directed to improve the efficiency of the small-scale fisheries, instead of displacing them through the indiscriminate encouragement of industrial fisheries.

**3** The future of small-scale fisheries is threatened by the intrusion of industrial fishing vessels into coastal waters. Too often the national governments are purposively passive due to their vested interests in joint ventures with foreign countries. The recent development of highly sophisticated industrial technologies for spotting and catching fish, combined with the ineffectiveness of protection measure by the coastal states, make bio-logical overfishing an impending reality for many Third World nations endowed with fish resources of commercial value.

**4** In many countries, the process of industrialization, the growth of tourism, and the uncontrolled expansion of Urban areas have caused a serious degradation of aquatic ecosystem through pollution and other obnoxious effects.

**5** Projects of Fisheries development, many backed by international assistance often Fails mainly because of lack of participation of the local people in the conception, preparation and implementation of the programs.

**6** In its assistance programs and development projects for fishermen, national governments often play an opportunistic role and frequently resort to manipulative practices. Where strong people’s organization exists, there is the possibility of determining the focus of such interventions in favour of the small fishermen.

**7** The working conditions of workers employed in the industrial fisheries are hazardous and exploitative:

INSECURE JOB AGREEMENTS  
ABSENCE OF SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS  
POOR WORKING CONDITIONS  
LOW WAGES AND EXCESSIVE USE OF PIECE-WAGE SYSTEM

## **Recommendations**

**1** We, fishworkers and their supporters from 34 countries of the world who struggle for survival and sometimes die for their cause.

**2** We urge governments to be responsive to the demands of the local fishworkers organizations to;

→ RESERVE AND PROTECT FOR SMALL –SCALE FISHING ALL NEAR SHORE WATERS AND FISHING GROUNDS ACCESSIBLE TO IT

→ BAN ALL TECHNOLOGIES THAT DISTURB THE BALANCE OF THE ECOSYSTEM EITHER THROUGH OVERFISHING OR POLLUTION AND PREVENT THE USE OF CHEMICALS THAT ARE FORBIDDEN IN THE INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES

→ ASSOCIATE LOCAL FISHERMEN’S ORGANIZATIONS OR FISHERMEN COMMUNITIES IN DEVISING AND IMPLEMENTING REGULATORY MEASURES (WITH CONCRETE POSSIBILITIES OF CONTROL)

→ RESPECT AND GUARANTEE THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF FISHWORKERS TO FREE ASSOCIATION; WITHDRAW ALL MEASURES THAT PENALIZE THE WORKERS.

**3** We recommend that governments of the Third World cooperate on a regional basis to resources in the long term.

**4** We stress the essential role of women in fishing communities considering their sensitivity to the deteriorating quality of life. We support them in getting organized to.

→ PROTECT THEIR ACTIVITIES IN THE PRODUCTION PROCESS,

→ IMPROVE THEIR WORKING CONDITIONS,

→ ALLEVIATE THE BURDEN OF THEIR WORK,

→ **ACTIVELY REDUCE POLLUTION AND PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT.**

We call for a collective effort in changing attitudes and values towards women in order to get their full participation in decision making at all levels.

**5** We emphasize the positive contribution of non-governmental organizations in the development of technology and forms of participatory management that ensure the future of small-scale fisheries,

**6** Priority should be given to lessening dependence on foreign capital, equipment and know-how;

**7** We ask that all scientists who recognize the importance of conserving and enhancing the person-nature relationship take a strong stand on behalf of the small-scale fishermen. We urge them to work in collaboration with local fishermen's organizations to complement their knowledge of the sea and to enable them to regain their rights over the sea.

## **Implementation**

AS A RESULT OF THE CONFERENCE, WE SHALL STRUCTURE AT REGIONAL LEVELS, A NETWORK THAT WOULD DO THE FOLLOWING:

**A** Direct efforts towards the creation of a solid mass based organization of fishworkers at national levels, which would set the direction and control of the nature of assistance necessary in their struggle.

**B** Facilitate communication with Sub-regions among groups of fishworkers regarding:

NATURE OF CONCRETE PROBLEMS THEIR STRUGGLES RESPONSES

SPECIFIC NEEDS SUCH AS APPROPRIATE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, FINNANCIAL AND OTHER EDUCATIONAL NEEDS.

SOLIDARITY BUILDING THROUGH INTERACTION ON VARIOUS LEVELS SUCH AS MEETINGS, SEMINARS EXCHANGE OF WRITTEN INFORMATION... ETC.,

**C** From each regional network representatives should take part in a largest coordinating committee for the purpose of studding concrete proposals for further action to strength then concerted efforts in support of the fishworkers' struggle at the respective national and regional levels.

**D** Take necessary steps to see that small-scale and the other fishermen's organizations get representative status in the international labour organization.