

Report from Ghana

The following is a report on the workshop on the International Labour Conference and the proposed comprehensive ILO standard on work in the fishing sector, held at Accra, Ghana on 21 April 2004

ICSF and TESCOOD

Introduction

Following a presentation on recent developments in Ghanaian fisheries by S. N. K. Quaaty of the Fisheries Department, Ghana, Sebastian Mathew, Programme Adviser, ICSF, gave an introduction to the forthcoming ILO Convention on a comprehensive standard on work in the fishing sector. The following questions were used to discuss the proposed labour standards:

1. What should be the scope of the proposed ILO labour standard in the fishing sector?
 - a) Should it apply to inland waters?
 - b) Should it apply to inland and marine waters?
 - c) Should it apply only to marine waters?
 - d) Should it apply to waters less than 3 nautical miles?
 - e) Should it apply to waters less than 12 nautical miles?
 - f) Should it apply to waters less than 200 nautical miles?
 - g) Should it be based on vessel length/tonnage?
2. What should be the minimum age for work on board fishing vessels? Should it be based on the type of fishing?
3. Is medical examination for fishing required or not (with reference to 1(a) to (g) above)?
4. Should there be articles of agreement between vessel owners and workers (with reference to 1(a) to (g) above)?
5. Is Accommodation/provisions on board fishing vessels required (with reference to 1(a) to (g) above)?
6. Is a competency certificate necessary and what should be the minimum period of rest (with reference to 1(a) to (g) above)?

7. Are social security and measures for occupational safety and health required (with reference to 1(a) to (g) above)?
8. Is there a need for consultation in developing national legislation on the above?

Artisanal fishers group

This group reported a high incidence of child labour in the Volta Lake, where girl children aged 5 to 8 are involved in fishing, diving up to 12 ft to disentangle nets from tree trunks and branches underwater in the Volta reservoir. In view of the situation prevalent, inland fishers would like the minimum age to be fixed at five years.

High occupational hazards exist, and accidents on the Lake have been reported that related to both fishing and transportation. There is hardly any safety equipment on board the transport boats. More accidents occur in inland waters than in marine waters. Many are undocumented, and the group felt that there should be mechanisms to document such accidents.

Semi-industrial fishers group

The group recommended a minimum age of 15 for commercial fishing, with the caveat that it could be less if the children are working with their parents. The group felt that a minimum age is required for both inland and marine fishing sectors. Medical examination for all categories should be made mandatory, as should be the signing of articles of agreement for all categories.

The group argued for accommodation and provisions for all categories of fishing vessels, as well as competency certificates and minimum rest periods for crew on board all categories of fishing vessels. The group called for the reintroduction of the Technical Assistance Committee (TAC) programme at the Regional Maritime Academy to train the fishermen in navigation and seamanship and safety at sea.

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Questions 7 and 8 should also apply to all categories, the group felt. However, it recognized that it will take time to implement labour standards in fishing. Meanwhile, there should be consultations in doing so.

Industrial fishers group

The industrial fisheries sector is characterized by poor working conditions like excessive exposure to heat in onboard processing

plants. Remuneration is poor, as is medical care. Safety equipment for crew is absent, and sanitation in the vessels and factories is poor. Where they exist, sanitation facilities offer unequal access, with officers having better facilities than workers. Toilets are often too close to onboard processing facilities. Drinking water is unsafe, and cockroaches and rodents roam in the cabins.

The group called for the strengthening of the capacity of enforcing institutions and an intensification of monitoring and enforcement of relevant ILO legal instruments that have been ratified by Ghana.

The scope of the proposed standard should apply to all categories, the group felt. In open-access regimes, it would be useful to have labour standards that could also help resource management.

The minimum age requirements should be in line with the Constitution of Ghana. Setting a minimum age for the industrial sector is fine, the group felt, but it is difficult to do so in the artisanal sector since there is a need for apprenticeship. (“If you start at 15, then you can’t even stand on a canoe!” was one comment.)

Medical examination should be made compulsory for all, as should articles of agreement for all categories of workers and share-earners since they can give a sense of security.

Accommodation should apply to 1(e) and (f) above; competency from 1(a) to (g); occupational safety from 1(a) to (g); social security also from 1(a) to (g). Social security is a constitutional requirement in Ghana that takes care of old age and death.

The group felt the need for a national consultation that would impart a sense of ownership and legitimacy.

Conclusion

This meeting was rather unique in the sense that it had the participation of all the three main sub-sectors in Ghana’s fishing sector—namely, industrial, semi-industrial and artisanal—as well as the marine and inland sectors. From the discussions, it was observed that social security and occupational safety and health are issues common to all the three sub-sectors. It was also observed how discussing the proposed ILO labour standard for fishing helped bring a labour perspective to the issues related to fishing. The workshop focused on the common future of Ghanaian fisheries from the twin perspective of resource management and labour standards. ■