

SAMUDRA Monograph

**Social Security for Fishworkers
in Brazil:
A Case Study of Pará**

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Social Security for Fishworkers in Brazil: A Case Study of Pará

Introduction

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), social security implies the protection provided by society to its members (both present and future generations), through public measures, against social and economic deprivation. Such deprivation can originate from loss or reduction of livelihoods, due to specific situations like illness, maternity, labour accidents or occupational hazards, unemployment, disability, old age and so on.

In Brazil, social security measures first appeared during the Empire, in the 19th century, with the first *montepíos*, co-operative institutions established to provide pensions to civil servants and their dependents. Through other periodic measures, Brazil's social welfare system has evolved to include more categories of professions and a broader range of benefits offered. During the decade of the 1930s, as part of the country's industrialization process, social welfare benefits were extended to urban workers in the formal sector of the economy. Only in the 1960s did rural workers get included in such a social welfare system.

The constitutional reformulation of Article 195 in 1988 created the 'special categories' in the social welfare system. Artisanal fishermen, their spouses and children above the age of 16 are classified in the special category. Later, through Law 8.287 of 20 December 1991, the unemployment insurance scheme was created for the artisanal fishermen. Leaders of fishermen's organizations consider these measures 'victories' resulting from their mobilization around the issue of social security

Artisanal fisheries, besides being risky and providing only highly fluctuating yields (and thus incomes) for fishermen and fishing communities, is also characterized by the precariousness of equipment and labour conditions prevalent in the sector. Hence the need for social protection measures for fishworkers and their dependents is even more crucial. Yet, prevailing social security systems, especially in developing countries, usually do not take into account fishworkers or, when they do, generally offer only poor and

restrained benefits, compared to those accorded to other professional categories, notably those engaged in the formal sector of the economy in urban areas.

This study is meant to understand the current status of the social welfare system available in Brazil for the fisheries sector, from the point of view of democratization of access, the methodologies used and the extent to which demands have been taken into account. Brazil's social welfare system is currently the focus of restructuring programmes by the government, which aim to reduce the growing 'deficits' of the system. Reductions in the scope of benefits can be expected from the ongoing reforms, which is another reason to analyze the functioning and range of the social welfare system in fisheries, particularly for artisanal fishworkers, among the most neglected and marginalized of categories to figure in the system, alongside small agriculturalists, mineral gatherers and indigenous peoples.

This study is divided into eight sections. The first is a socioeconomic profile of Pará State in northern Brazil. The second section outlines the major characteristics and importance of the fisheries sector in Pará State. The third traces the evolution of the Brazilian social welfare system, based on specific documentation of legislation, paying particular attention to the status of fishworkers.

The fourth section—based mainly on interviews with professional leaders, particularly those heading fishermen's *colônias* (local fishermen's professional organizations) and associations—analyzes the conditions of access to social security benefits and rights.

The fifth section draws on interviews with those in charge of support organizations, such as Movimento de Pescadores do Pará (MOPEPA, Movement of Fishermen from Pará State), Movimento Nacional dos Pescadores (MONAPE, the National Movement of Fishworkers) and Conselho Pastoral dos Pescadores (CPP, the Pastoral Fishermen's Council).

The sixth section puts together information provided by technicians from public institutions that operate the social welfare system. The seventh section analyzes aspects of gender and age, while the final eighth section draws conclusions and offers recommendations.

1. Pará State: Socioeconomic Profile

Located in the northern region of Brazil, Pará is the second largest State in territorial area (1,253,164.5 sq km), representing around 17 per cent of Brazil's territory and 26 per cent of the Brazilian Amazon. It accounts for 562 km of the Atlantic coast and 40 per cent of the interior waters of Brazil, being part of the larger Amazon basin. It is politically divided into 143 towns, distributed in 6 *meso* regions and 22 micro-regions.

The following are some of the important characteristics of Pará State:

- Total population (in 2000): 6,192,307, of which 67 per cent live in urban areas
- Gender distribution: Men: 51 per cent; Women: 49 per cent
- Percentage of illiterates above 10 years of age: 16
- Gross Domestic Product (in 2001) US\$7,500; Per capita annual income: US\$1,184.48
- The economy of the State is based on agriculture, cattle raising and extraction of natural resources like wood and, in smaller amounts, fish (including shrimp). The State has very large projects for export of minerals, including iron, copper and bauxite, the latter for producing alumina and aluminum. The mineral and wood industries export mainly raw materials and some processed products.
- Most of the agriculture is practised by small-scale units producing crops for internal consumption, with manioc still being one of the most important, in terms of volume. The federal government's development policies in the Amazon region during the 1970s stimulated the establishment, and subsequent expansion of, large cattle farms. The creation of roads, and corporate tax exemption encouraged the industrial occupation of the southern regions of the State. Conflicts over land soon became frequent, and agrarian reform programmes grew timid.
- Soy plantations in the southeastern part of the State have been expanding, with negative environmental impacts, consequent to their requirement for large areas for cultivation
- The Human Development Index for the State is 0.723, compared to Brazil's national figure of 0.766, ranking Pará 20th among the 27 Brazilian States (in 2000).

2. Fisheries: Major Characteristics

According to statistics from the Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis (IBAMA, the Brazilian environment institute), Pará is the country's leading fish producer. In 2001, according to IBAMA, Pará produced 159,454 tonnes, followed by Santa Catarina, with 150,637 tonnes, and Rio Grande do Sul, with a more modest 76,614 tonnes (IBAMA)¹. The Executive Secretary for Industry, Commerce and Mining predicts that Pará's annual production of fish might reach around 650,000 tonnes per year.

Most of the production (98.3 per cent) comes from extractive fishing. The participation of the artisanal sector is much greater than the industrial, accounting for 87.4 per cent of annual production, compared to 10.9 per cent for the latter.

The artisanal sector comprises diverse groups, including productive units belonging to shipowners who hire employees, family producers, and quasi-agriculturalist fishers (who fish in rivers and work the land, seasonally or permanently). Besides, according to A. C. Diegues (1995, p. 108)², part of the production figuring in official statistics as industrial comes, in fact, from the artisanal sector³. Despite its ambiguity, the term 'artisanal' is used in this study to distinguish the small-scale sector from the industrial.

The socioeconomic importance of artisanal fishing is underlined by its role as a source of food for communities, in contrast to industrial fisheries, which aims first at external markets and only secondly at the domestic market. Artisanal production, however, aims to supply local, national and regional markets.

Despite the economic and social importance of the fishing sector for the region, there is still a great lack of systematic data about the sector's basic characteristics, the forms of organization prevalent in it, and the day-to-day problems that fishermen and fishing communities face in general.

There are 100,000 fishermen in the State, as estimated by Federação dos Pescadores do Pará (FEPA, the fishermen's federation in Pará) and MOPEPA. According to FEPA's figures, quoted in Sistema Nacional de Emprego–Pará (SINE-PA), 2003⁴, in 2001, there were 48,788 fishermen enrolled in 65 *colonias*. About half of them do not figure in the estimates, especially those who do not own craft or gear.

According to Superintendência do Desenvolvimento da Pesca (SUDEPE), in 1988, around 55 per cent of the fishworkers were concentrated in the northeast of the State, working in the coastal and estuarine fisheries. The colonies in the municipalities of the northeast of Pará—including the metropolitan region of Belém and part of Marajó Island, which cover the estuary areas of the Tocantins and Para rivers—accounted for half the total population of fishermen registered in the State (FEPA, 2001; quoted in SINE-PA, 2003)⁵.

Generally, the fishermen of Pará fish in several environments, along the coast, and in rivers, lakes and mangrove swamps. Seagoing fishermen often operate in distant waters, looking for *pesqueiros* (the local term for fishing grounds) even in neighbouring States like Amapá and Maranhão. They are forced to go so far out because of the decrease in fish stocks as a result of environmental factors, growing fishing pressure and the absence of systematic management measures.

Based on a sample of 1,215 fishermen (2.5 per cent of the total fishermen registered in the fishing colonies) drawn up by SINE in 2003, the following characteristics of the State's artisanal fishermen can be enumerated:

- Gender composition: Men: 89 per cent; Women: 11 per cent
 - Around a third (31 per cent) of the population are between 40 and 49 years old; almost the same proportion (30.6 per cent) are 50 years or older; 24.7 per cent are between 30 and 39 years; 8.3 per cent are between 25 and 29 years old; and 5.4 per cent are between 18 and 24 years old.
- The educational levels of the fishermen are, generally, low. According to the research findings, 21 per cent never went to school, while 23 per cent had only up to four years of education. Only 0.5 per cent registered nine to 11 years of high-school education.
- Most of those interviewed (85.6 per cent) fished regularly, throughout, or for the most part of, the year, while 14.4 per cent fished intermittently, for lack of fishing gear of their own or due to lack of crew positions on fishing vessels.
- While a little more than half fished daily, around a third said they went fishing for periods of up to a week. In this last category are the motorized vessels, while the non-motorized canoes

focused on daytime fishing. The remainder 13 per cent fished for longer periods.

- Around 22 per cent of the sample fished on their own, 48 per cent as family units (11 per cent with spouses, 18.6 per cent with offspring, and 18 per cent with other relatives) and 42 per cent with others. These figures illustrate the importance of social relationships in fishing.
- Approximately 89 per cent of the State's fish production is marketed commercially and 7 per cent consumed by the fishing communities themselves, while 4 per cent is bartered for other products.
- About 70 per cent of the production is sold through middlemen, without any formal contracts.
- Typically, a fisherman's family comprises five or six individuals. Of the family members in the survey sample, 72 per cent were 10 years or older, and around 46 per cent reported regular occupations.
- Among those with an occupation, 62 per cent were male and 38, female. Most of the occupations (56 per cent) were within the fishing sector.
- Of the sons/daughters who reported having an occupation, 62.3 per cent were in fishing. However, young fishermen made up a very small proportion of the sample, which may suggest that the children who fished with their parents did so temporarily.

3. Social Security for Artisanal Fishworkers

The social security system in Brazil is uniform, that is, every State is governed by the same legislation. This centralized model began in the 1930s and expanded strongly during the military regime of 1964-84, when almost all categories of workers, including rural workers, got covered.

The first initiatives for social security for workers in Brazil appeared around the beginning of the 19th century, when the slavery system still prevailed. During the first phases of industrialization, especially in the southeast regions of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the government introduced programmes to cover some categories of public-sector workers, particularly strategic ones like railroad and harbour workers, crucial for the export industry centred around coffee and sugar. One example was Law

No. 3.397 of 24 November 1888, which created a savings bank for the workers of each public railroad. In 1989, a widows' fund and a pension fund were established, the first directed at the postal service and the second, for the workers of the royal press. Law No. 3.724 of 15 January 1919, for the first time, instituted compensation for work-related accidents.

However, it is with the 'Eloy Chaves Law'⁶ of 1923 that social security is officially considered to have started in Brazil. That law created a retirement and pension savings fund for railroad workers who could draw on it when they retired or were made invalid. It also afforded medical assistance as well as pensions to the next-of-kin of deceased workers. The significance of the Eloy Chaves Law is that it introduced a model for the organization of the social security system, which later led to the institution of various sectorwise retirement savings funds and pensions. Later, in the 1930s, the government established several pension and retirement institutes (called *Institutos de Aposentadorias e Pensões*, IAPs) for different categories of urban workers. It was during the authoritarian government of Getulio Vargas (1937-1945) that the rapid industrialization of the southeast region of Brazil started, with the strong support of the State. Part of the industrialization effort involved regulating labour relations, especially in the urban industrial sector. The setting up of social security measures for salaried workers aimed to promote economic and social stability to attract investors and stabilize the labour force.

The creation of IAPs expanded the coverage of the social security system. Nevertheless, several segments of the formal labour market were not covered, not to mention rural workers and other categories in the informal sectors. It is estimated that, by the end of the 1950s, only 30 per cent of the workforce in the country was protected, which reveals the huge limitations and iniquity of the system.⁷

The trend to move to a unified system hastened with the promulgation of *Lei Orgânica da Previdência Social* (LOPS, the organic social security law), Law No. 3.807 of 28 August 1960. It included new benefits, such as assistance for convalescence, funerals and births, and covered a larger number of workers, employers and autonomous professionals. LOPS aimed to cover the entire urban workforce, except domestic workers and religious ministers, categories that were included later, in 1972, compulsorily for the former and optionally for the latter.

At the start of the 1960s, the State's attention turned to rural workers, who were out of the system until then. In 1963, the Fundo de Assistência e Previdência do Trabalhador Rural (FAPTR, the Assistance and Security Fund for Rural Workers) was created to provide coverage, though very limited, for this large group. In 1969, it was renamed Fundo de Assistência ao Trabalhador Rural (FUNRURAL).

Analyzing the evolution of the social security system in Brazil, Schwarzer underlines its slow expansion, despite the fact that the country's constitution of 1934 was supposed to establish social security protection as a right for every Brazilian worker (Schwarzer, 2000). However, rural workers, those in the autonomous and informal sectors, and domestic workers (mostly women working as housemaids) were not covered. Although Brazil was, at the time, predominantly rural, these sections did not represent politically articulate and powerful enough pressure groups to be forced into the reckoning by the State. Brumer expresses a similar point of view, stressing the 'rural conformism' that prevailed in Brazil until the 1950s (Brumer, 2002).

By the start of the 1960s, social movements in Brazil's rural areas had achieved prominence. Struggling for land and agrarian reforms, rural workers and their interests could no longer be ignored. It was in this context that the FAPTR and FUNRURAL were promulgated. The same statute regulated the rural labour unions and, for the first time, made mandatory the payment of minimum wages to rural employees⁸.

Though the FUNRURAL benefits plan was wide-ranging, it has been criticized for its poor supervision. Schwarzer argues that such a legal framework had merely demonstrative effects, and did not truly promote a public system of social security in rural areas.

Paradoxically, it was during Brazil's military regime (1964-1984) that the social security system expanded and got consolidated, integrating the rural sector as well. Decree No. 72 of 21 November 1966 abolished the IAPs, merging the old structures into Instituto Nacional de Previdência Social (INPS, the National Institute for Social Security), associated with the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. At the same time, Instituto de Administração Financeira da Previdência e Assistência Social (IAPAS, the Institute for Financial Administration of Social Security and Assistance) was created to regulate the financial resources for social security.

A new programme for rural assistance, Programa de Apoio à Pequena Produção Familiar Rural Organizada (PRORURAL, the Support Programme for Small Organized Rural Family Production), was started in 1971. Linked to FUNRURAL, it extended retirement benefits for rural workers (to be availed at 70 years of age or due to invalidity) and improved the health services offered. It also offered a pension scheme, with a smaller value (70 per cent of the retirement pension), and funeral assistance. The health services component covered medical, surgical, dental and hospitalization emergencies. Interestingly, women were covered by the scheme if they headed the family or if they were rural employees.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the rural unions and *colônias*, though recognized, were controlled by the government. PRORURAL provided them with some infrastructure for offering health services to their affiliates. Old-age pensions (valued at half the minimum wage, which, as on 1 May 2004 was US\$86 per month) were given to workers at age 70. For widows, the pension value was even lower. Due to the distances and the prevailing power structure in most of the rural areas in Brazil, the health support for these groups was far from sufficient. In many cases, access to the State bureaucracy to apply for a benefit depended on patron-client relations, politicians, middlemen or members of the local elite.

In 1974, the Ministry for Social Security was created, and in 1977, Sistema Nacional de Previdência e Assistência Social (SINPAS, the national social security and assistance system)⁹ was established. Employees, independent workers and employers had to contribute part of their income to the official security system, according to levels of earnings. Other financial sources for the system's budget were also tapped.¹⁰

This restructuring was necessary for the expansion of the system and the increase in both the number of workers covered and the benefits granted, in the context of the great political centralization in the federal government.

To understand how the rural sector got included in the social welfare system during the authoritarian military regime, it is necessary to remember that in the 1970s, the government developed a powerful modernization policy for the rural sector, emphasizing agricultural exports, commodities production, mechanization and the use of fertilizers and chemical inputs. The modernization policy had a great impact on rural producers, who were previously accorded low priority in development policies. However, rural-

urban migration and land conflicts increased. According to a study (Malloy and Schwarzer, 2000), through the social security programme, the government tried to minimize the social problems in the countryside, as part of the prevailing national security regime. However, paternalism and overcentralization created dependency relations, and led to the government controlling the rural unions, *colonias* and fishermen's associations. Health assistance, for instance, was paid through agreements with representative entities of the local workers, who became "explicitly partners of FUNRURAL" (Schwarzer 2000, p.9). The 'partnership' with the authoritarian State allowed it to turn unions into instruments of social control. By receiving public funds, most unions became service agencies rather than political organizations. The mandatory nature of union membership would end only in 1988, after the dictatorial regime.

By the 1990s, Brazil's rural labour force, including small-scale and artisanal fishers, had been completely incorporated into the official social security system. Researchers often comment on the peculiar evolution of the Brazilian rural welfare system, which was contrary to international trends and which resulted partially from pressures from below. In 1988, after the end of the military regime, the huge pro-democracy mobilization led to the establishment of the National Constituent Assembly and a new constitution. The small-scale fishermen were represented in a movement called 'Fisheries Constituent', formed in 1986 by the National Fishermen's Federation, representing fishermen's *colônias* in different parts of the country, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Fishermen's Pastoral Council, researchers, political activists and technicians from State institutions, notably SUDEPE, at that time the official institute responsible for fisheries development.

Brazil's constitution regards social security as one of the fundamental social rights, along with education, health, work, leisure, safety, and maternity and childhood welfare. According to Article 194 of the constitution, social security is considered to be "an initiative emanating from public power and from society and designed to assure the rights related to health, welfare and social assistance". Article 195 (complemented by Laws 8.212 and 8.213 of 1991) defines the 'special insured' category to include rural producers, sharecroppers, prospectors, artisanal fishers and their spouses, and those engaged in the informal 'family' economy. These articles are considered landmarks in the history of social welfare in Brazil, because they sought to correct the prevailing rural-urban iniquity.

For social welfare purposes, an artisanal fisherman is defined as one who, individually or in a family-economy regime, reports fishing as his main occupation or source of livelihood, uses a boat of under 10 tonnes capacity, and does not rely on hired labour. (Shellfish collectors are considered to be in the same category.) The spouse of an artisanal fisher, as well as children above 16, can apply for the special insured status. The special insured status can be denied to a person who already enjoys the benefits of any other welfare scheme, receives wages from elsewhere or has permanent employees in the fishery.

Importantly, women fishworkers are eligible for the welfare rights as individuals, regardless of whether their husbands are beneficiaries themselves or whether they are widow-pensioners. (In the past, women would be entitled to the benefits only if they were the heads of the family.) Children above 16 years of age also have the same rights, as long as they work in similar conditions.

Since the entitlements do not correspond to the worker's contribution (monetarily or in terms of man-hours), the welfare system is not a contributory one. So, theoretically, it is better adapted to the characteristics of small producers like artisanal fishermen, whose incomes are, in general, fluctuating and low. Schwarzer characterizes the Brazilian old-age protection system as a "basic universal non-contributive model", which is not linked to the income received by the worker during his active working life. In addition, Schwarzer explains, it is not the 'residual-assistance' type that exists in other countries, since the eligibility criteria are not based on needs, but on previous work experience in fishing or farming.

3.1 Classification of the Insured

For purposes of social security, rural workers, including fishermen, are classified into the following categories: (a) employee, (b) individual contributor, (c) temporary employee, and (d) specially insured. Most artisanal fishermen are in the special insured category, but in the State of Pará, there are fishermen in the other categories as well, though few in number. In one sample survey of about 50,000 fishermen, only 1.2 per cent were individual contributors, and not special insured.

3.2 Social Security Benefits

To avail of welfare benefits, a fisherman has to sign up with the Instituto Nacional de Seguro Social (INSS, the National Institute of Social Welfare)

and pay a monthly contribution of 2.1 per cent of his total income. Of the contribution, 2 per cent goes for social welfare and 0.1 per cent to finance work-accident pensions. (Fishermen and small-scale farmers have been exempted from this payment until the year 2006.)

Any claim must be backed by a personal identification card, the INSS membership card, and documentation proving the artisanal fisherman's status (owner, partner, crew member, etc.). The latter can be a declaration by the fisherman's *colonia* registered with IBAMA, containing details like date of birth, parents' names, and work and social security card numbers, among others. Other documents, like children's birth certificates, vaccination cards or military recruitment certificates, may also be used to prove the fisherman's status. Where there are no fishermen's colonies, declarations by local administrative or judiciary authorities will suffice.

Of the 12 benefits available in general, fishworkers are entitled to 10, as shown in Table 1 below. During the period of eligibility, the beneficiary will receive the minimum wage each month.

Table 1: Benefits of Social Security According to the Categories of Rural Workers*

Benefits	Categories		
	Employee/ Independent Worker	Individual	Special
Retirement by Age	X	X	X
Sickness Assistance	X	X	X
Retirement by Invalidity	X	X	X
Assistance for Work-related Accident	X	X	X
Retirement Due to Accidental Invalidity	X	-	X
Accident Assistance	X	-	X
Maternity Wage	X	X	X
Pension on Death	X	X	X
Incarceration Assistance	X	X	X
Retirement Due to Contribution Time	X	X	X
Special Retirement	X	-	-
Family Wage	X	-	-

* *Notes*

- Retirement age: 60 for men and 55 for women
- Assistance for work-related accident: for victims of accidents that cause permanent damage
- Maternity wage: a minimum wage for pregnant women (or those who have miscarried) paid monthly for four months after the eighth month of pregnancy, provided the woman can prove that she has been working as a fisherwoman or rural worker for at least 10 months
- Death pension: for the insured's legal heirs (spouse and children younger than 21 or any age, if invalid)
- Incarceration assistance: for the dependents of the insured, during the period of imprisonment, as long as the income of the insured is below \$560.81. The benefit is suspended in case the imprisoned insured escapes.
- Retirement due to contribution time: for those who intend to retire with a pension whose value is higher than the minimum wage, a right acquired through contributions to the social security system for a minimum of 15 years
- Special retirement: a benefit related to occupational hazards like exposure to harmful chemicals or physical or biological agents
- Family wage: for the maintenance of children or dependents under 14 years old, or at any age, if invalid

4. The Special Unemployment Insurance Scheme

This scheme is meant for the fishworkers categorized as 'special insured' and is granted annually during the fishing closure season. Those entitled to the benefit receive one minimum wage for each month of the closed season, which lasts, generally, four months. Thus, the programme also has an environmental conservation motive.

The scheme was instituted by Law No.8.287 of 20 November 1991 and modified by Law No.10.779 of 25 November 2003. Unlike the previous schemes, this is not managed by the Social Welfare Ministry but by the Ministry of Labour and Employment and is funded by the federal government's Workers Support Fund.

Only professional fishers registered with IBAMA, the federal government institute related to the environment, can apply for the unemployment insurance. IBAMA is the agency mandated to establish the closed season and specify closure periods and prohibited areas and species. Anyone caught fishing forbidden species can be fined or have his or her gear confiscated.

At the start of each closed season, the fisherman or fisherwoman who seeks unemployment insurance must approach the local office of either Delegacia Regional do Trabalho (DRT, the Regional Directory of Labour) or the Sistema Nacional de Emprego (SINE, the National Employment System). In villages or towns where these offices are not present, the municipal *colônia* will substitute for the qualification process. Since 2003, the Secretary of Aquaculture and Fishing has been in charge of issuing the fishermen's professional identity cards.

Thus, several organizations are involved in the operation of this insurance scheme: IBAMA, the Ministry of Labour and Employment, SINE, INSS and the fishermen's *colônias*¹¹. The last three categories are expected to mobilize fishers and inform them of, and familiarize them with, the various insurance categories and related rights and duties.

The grassroots-level operation of the scheme will depend on the strength of the local *colônia*, which, in turn, is related to its own particular history, the history of the social movements in the area, and to the level of activism of its members. To illustrate this for Pará State, Table 2 correlates, for the period 2001-2002, the number of affiliates of the *colônias* in the municipalities where closed seasons for fishing exist, to the number of local fishermen benefiting from unemployment insurance. It is worth remembering that a tiny proportion of the *colônias'* members do not qualify for the benefit, as they do not fit into the special insured status (for example, retired fishermen, owners of larger boats, employers, fishermen who are formally employed, and so on) The table refers to 49 municipalities with closed seasons out of a total of 65 *colônias* in the State.

Table 2 shows that only in eight municipalities were more than half the fishermen population covered by unemployment insurance. This reveals both a lack of awareness among fishing communities about their rights and duties, as well as the procedural difficulties facing potential insurance beneficiaries.

Table 2: Percentage of Artisanal Fishermen Benefiting from Unemployment Insurance in 2001-2002, Related to the Number of Affiliates in the Municipal *Colônias*, in Pará State

Towns	Per cent	Towns	Per cent
Santarém	52.7	Baião	55.8
Óbidos	36.6	Cametá	71.9
Alenquer	77.2	Igarapé-Miri	24.2
Juruti	10.7	Limoeiro do Ajurú	...
Oriximiná	8.5	Mocajuba	45.0
Monte Alegre	20.7	Oeiras do Pará	7.3
Prainha	44.6	Viseu	17.7
Almeirim	7.9	Aveiro	13.3
Porto de Moz	...	Itaituba	3.5
Soure	17.2	Altamira	41.5
Salvaterra	66.5	Senador José Porfírio	...
Cachoeira do Arari	56.1	Vitória do Xingu	51.3
Sta. Cruz do Arari	18.4	Itupiranga	...
Ponta de Pedras	39.5	Breu Branco	12.7
Muaná	12.0	Jacundá	52.1
S. Sebastião da B. Vista	43.0	Nova Ipixuna	4.0
Curralinho	43.6	Tucuruí	56.6
Chaves	6.3	Goianésia do Pará	...
Bagre	43.0	São Félix do Xingu	...
Portel	21.5	Marabá	31.9
Gurupá	44.0	São João do Araguaia	10.0
Melgaço	...	São Geraldo do Araguaia	10.0
Barcarena	33.7	Redenção	...
Abaetetuba	45.9	Conceição do Araguaia	17.0
Santana do Araguaia	6.5	-	-

Source: SINE

Table 3 shows the regional breakup of unemployment insurance beneficiaries, by sex and schooling.

Table 3: Artisanal Fishworkers Receiving Unemployment Insurance According to Sex and Schooling, 2003

Schooling	Women			Men			Total		
	Brazil	North	Pará	Brazil	North	Pará	Brazil	North	Pará
Illiterate	5,318	1,817	1,547	43,708	16,631	7,142	49,026	18,448	8,689
3 years' schooling	3,035	972	774	33,613	6,244	3,708	36,648	7,216	4,482
4 years' schooling	1,197	107	44	10,517	1,517	197	11,714	1,624	241
7 years' schooling	774	83	48	7,703	886	230	8,477	969	278
8 years' schooling	263	32	11	2,008	157	22	2,271	189	33
Over 8 years' schooling	245	22	6	1,544	141	33	1,789	161	39
Unknown	2	1	1	93	42	1	95	43	2
Total	10,839	3,034	2,431	99,186	20,618	11,334	110,025	23,652	13,765

Source: Ministry of Labour and Employment

The proportion of women beneficiaries in Pará seems relatively higher. Of the 13,765 beneficiaries, 18 per cent were women. In the northern region, of a total of 23,652, the percentage of women was 13, while for Brazil as a whole, it was 10, for a total of 110,025. According to Table 3, Pará accounted for 12 per cent of the total number of unemployment insurance beneficiaries in Brazil and 58 per cent of the total in the northern region. With 10,839 fisherwomen in 2003, Pará accounted for 22 per cent of the total women beneficiaries in Brazil, a significantly larger proportion than the national level.

The data confirms the low level of education prevalent in the area, which also reports a significant number of illiterates, among men and women alike. In this regard, Pará and the northern region are poorer than Brazil as a whole, since more than half the beneficiaries in the northern region are illiterate, and 30 per cent have fewer than four years of schooling. In Pará, the proportion was 63 per cent and 32 per cent, for men and women, respectively. For Brazil as a whole, the proportion of illiterates is relatively

lower, though still high: 44 per cent in the case of men, and 49 per cent in the case of women. Among the men, 34 per cent had fewer than four years of schooling, while, in the case of women, 28 per cent reported the same level of education.

Only by taking Brazil as a whole do we get a statistically significant group of fishers reporting four years of schooling: 10 per cent of the men and 11 per cent of the women. In Pará, this percentage falls to 1.74 for men and 1.81 for women. Although these statistics refer only to the receivers of unemployment insurance, they can be seen as representative of the fishing community category as a whole.

In the 2003 SINE study of a sample of 1,215 fishermen in Pará, the authors found that the main reasons for not accessing unemployment insurance were the immense amount of paperwork involved and the waiting period for the benefits to accrue. Until November 2003, to avail of insurance benefits, it was necessary to have been registered as a fisherman for at least three years. Law No.10.779 of 25 November 2003 reduced the registration period to one year. The other reasons cited for not availing insurance benefits were: non-payment of *colônia* fees; receipt of other welfare benefits; lack of information or motivation; and critical opposition to the local *colônia*'s performance.

Despite the fact membership of a *colônia* is no longer compulsory in order to qualify for the social security benefits—the 1988 constitution consecrated the “freedom of union” principle—one of the documents that the State bureaucracy recognizes is the declaration of the *colônia*, signed by its president or his legal representative. This strategic role of the *colônias* affords opportunities for manipulation and corruption. Leaders may charge for the service, and illegal intermediaries may offer to represent the candidate in exchange for payment. Despite such potential abuse, *colônias* are central agents in fishworkers’ access to social welfare.

5. Difficulties in Access to Social Security

Just over half (52 per cent) of the 1,215 fishermen interviewed in the 2003 SINE study were registered at INSS, the National Institute of Social Welfare. This number should be a matter of concern, given that the same study found that 36 per cent of the informants had stopped working at least once during the previous 12 months, owing to health problems directly or indirectly linked to fisheries activities. Among the frequent

problems were backache, digestive and respiratory diseases, rheumatism, malaria, hernia and eyesight difficulties. The health complaints were more among the fishermen aged between 50 and 59 years; 48 per cent reported problems during the year of reference. Table 4 presents these data.

Table 4: Interruption of Fishing due to Health Problems, 2003

Ailment/Problem	Percentage
Spinal Column Problems	14.6
Work Accidents	9.6
Malaria	8.6
Digestive Problems	8.6
Respiratory Problems	7.3
Ray Stings	6.6
Rheumatism	6.3
Renal Problems	3.8
Indisposition (headaches, fever, etc.)	3.8
Hernia	2.5
Cerebral Vascular Accident	1.8
Heart Problems	1.8
Sight-related Problems	1.8
Diabetes	1.5
Dengue	1.3
Car Accidents	1.3
Prostate Problems	1.3
Chickenpox	1.0
Other Diseases	16.5
Total	100.0

The fact that 48 per cent of the fishermen interviewed were not enrolled in the social security scheme means that a significant proportion remains outside the protection network, making their financial situation more precarious. But the situation is improving with increasing enrolments, primarily due to the awareness-raising work done by the institutions linked to the MTE, responsible for the registration of fishermen.

In municipalities where fishing closures (*defeso*) have been established, more fishermen have enrolled in the welfare system. For example, the lower regions of the Amazon, Marajó Island and the southeast of Pará

(totally representing 35 *colônias*) report percentages of enrollment in social security as, respectively, 58.9, 74.9 and 64.9. Around Belém's metropolitan area, with five colonies and just one situated in a fishing-closure area, only 25 per cent of the fishermen interviewed had enrolled in the welfare system. The low enrollment of the fishermen in coastal areas is corroborated by the findings of Silva (2004). There is now a growing *pro-defeso* movement to protect the various coastal species threatened by overfishing. Researchers have stressed the seriousness of the problem¹².

According to the SINE study, older fishermen tended to sign up for social welfare measures in larger numbers than the younger fishermen, probably due to the retirement benefits:

The young professionals theoretically should be more conscious of the need for subscription to the social welfare system and the associated benefits. However, 70.3 per cent of those interviewed, who were between 18 and 24 years old, were not subscribed. This points to a potentially disastrous situation, bearing in mind the usual incidence of health problems that disable work. (SINE-PA, p.126)

Maneschy has reported frequent work stoppages by crab fishermen in mangrove swamps, an arduous environment that causes fatigue and work-related injuries (Maneschy, 1993). Drude, in her study of Bragança municipality in Pará, analyzed the common imagery these professionals have in relation to their health and bodies (Drude, 2003¹³). Raimundo Nonato, a 32-year old fisherman in Curuçazinho village, explained his work routine, highlighting its toughness:

I work every week, stopping during the weekends. Every month, I work three full weeks, I break off one, two days, because of the high tides, and also sickness, fever, flu... The mangrove, it disturbs our heads, because we have to work kneeling, setting the *laço* [trap for the crabs], and it is bad for our backs...¹⁴

Despite great advances in social development for fishing communities, in practice, access to welfare benefits is still problematic. Based on interviews with fishermen and their leaders, especially with presidents of the *colônias* and representatives of support organizations, the main barriers to access are discussed below:

5.1 Low level of information

A significant proportion of fishworkers are ignorant of their social rights, especially if they are not members of *colônias* or associations, which are key sources of information. Often, even when they are aware of their rights, they are ignorant of procedures. According to a *colônia* president:

...We search for fishermen and fisherwomen and explain why it's necessary for them to have proper papers, to prepare for when it's time to retire and get benefits from INSS, which is a right they have gained. There are many fishermen who don't know their rights, and even here in our own *colônia*, we have difficulties reaching out to these fishworkers.

5.2 Lack of documents

The lack of personal and professional documents is a prime reason for exclusion from welfare schemes. The SINE report found that 24 per cent of those interviewed did not have professional identity cards and around 36 per cent had no documents required to claim any social security benefit. Interviews with *colônia* directors confirmed this problem:

Another problem the *colônia* faces is the lack of documents for the fishermen. Many of them come to the *colônia* without even an ID card. We are now revising their documentation. A lot of benefits have been rejected because the claims were not filled in correctly. Now we are trying to fix them so that the fishermen can secure the benefits. We have 58-year old fisherwomen and 66-year old fishermen who have not retired yet... (Cametá *colônia* president)

The main difficulty is the lack of documentation. Many did not have CPF¹⁵, ID cards, electoral cards. Many of them own only their birth certificates, due to the difficulties in the hinterland and the costs involved in getting one. These are great problems... (Salvaterra *colônia* president)

There were the usual complaints of distances and difficulties in dealing with the bureaucratic staff:

Even though here in our island, we have a hospital and medical service, we have financial problems that prevent the fisherman from travelling [to the city where the social security office is located]. What's more, he is often shy about getting information and since our staff is small, we cannot represent everyone, for example, at INSS. And there is the fact that many fishermen don't have all the personal documents that INSS calls for. We prepare them with all the documentation of the *colônia*; and help them get the ID cards and other documents. But often the fisherman has lost his birth certificate, doesn't have a work card, and so has to get it all done again, then go back to take a photocopy, and so on, and it takes a whole year or so. So he forgets it, and doesn't bother with it anymore... (Mosqueiro *colônia* president)

However, the reality has been changing in the last few years, thanks to the work of numerous *colônias* and support organizations like CPP and MOPEPA. They not only provide information, but also encourage personal documentation, and sometimes even pay for travel to urban centres for that purpose. In this regard, *colônias* act as intermediates between the fishermen and the social security system, especially in towns where there are no official agencies.

5.3 Paucity of institutions

Several towns lack any effective representation of the institutions involved in social welfare. As such, the fishermen have to travel far to obtain the necessary documentation, which involves time and money, as the following testimony from the Cametá *colônia* president illustrates:

Another problem is the issue of the fisherman's card, which takes too long. We send the application to Belém [the capital of the State] and it takes time to come back. There are cards that have taken a year and four months to be ready. I think they [the institutions] lack the means to issue the cards, to the disadvantage of the fishermen. There are colleagues who should already be able to apply for the unemployment insurance, but they still haven't got their professional cards.

Those who need medical expertise for accident- and sickness-related welfare claims are also hampered by the lack of institutions. Most of the

towns do not have medical experts accredited with the INSS. To overcome this problem, the institute has recently introduced a mobile service—a boat and a vehicle that travel through rivers and roads of the State to provide medical assistance locally. However, due to the considerable distances involved, each town is visited only once in three months. If a fisherman falls ill or suffers an accident at other times, he has to seek another doctor in his own or another town. But that doctor's health examination report may not be accepted by the social security institution, as illustrated by the words of a leader from the low Amazon region:

We are having difficulties with the sickness assistance for crocodile bites, 'capivara'¹⁶ bites, snake bites, ray stings, etc. We can't claim the benefits because by the time the INSS boat arrives, the victim has often recovered. The authorities don't take into consideration the time the person was out of action, which is a serious matter.

There are also complaints that sometimes the INSS mobile service lacks sufficient expertise, as explained by the president of a *colônia* from Marajó Island:

Several times, the most important person—the expert doctor—does not come along with the mobile service. We want the boat to come completely equipped, not with only bureaucrats, as often happens.

5.4 Excessive bureaucracy

During the interviews with professional leaders, the most common and oft-quoted complaint related to the bureaucracy that the beneficiary has to wade through to gain access to the social security benefits. Besides the large number of documents for personal and professional identification, there is the additional burden of the actual travel to the offices of the institution, located in other towns. For health-related problems, a family member has to accompany the claimant on the trip. Besides adding to the expenses, this also implies a break in the income-generating activities of the escort, with negative consequences for the family.

The welfare claimant has to undergo two interviews, one with the doctor, in case of health-related assistance, and the other, with a social worker assistant. Claims for retirement must be backed with proof of links with the fisheries. There are lots of problems at this point, according to all the fishermen interviewed. Often the fishers do not feel comfortable during

the interview, as illustrated by the following testimony from a leader of fishermen in São Caetano de Odivelas, northeast of Pará:

It's difficult to get the benefits from INSS. The interview is hard. The fishermen are very humble people. Imagine being interviewed by people they have never seen! They get confused, they don't answer right. It's hard that way.

The fishermen are usually embarrassed during the interview with the technicians from the social welfare institution. Some questions may be wrongly understood, and the answers may mislead the technician into wrong conclusions, sometimes delaying the release of benefits or, worse, leading to an outright rejection. Ignorance of life in fishing communities adds to the problem. When they are not fishing or engaged in other capture activity, or during the off-season, many fishing families undertake agricultural activities and raise domestic animals. These activities form the basis for the barter of products between families, neighbours and communities, common in the Amazon region. However, this practice can be misunderstood by the welfare technician, as the following explanation from a *colônia* president illustrates:

The social worker assistant asks the fisherman: Where do you live? He gives her the address, saying, for example, I live in Mari Mari village. Then she goes on asking: Do you plant *açaí*?¹⁷ And the fisherman says, Yes. Do you plant *macaxeira*?¹⁸ I do. Then, he adds, I have pepper, chicory, and—growing prouder—says he has *cupuaçu* [a local fruit] too. On my land, we have everything, he says, we plant bananas, and make manioc flour... The social worker then sends the dossier to Brasilia, where the central INSS agency is located and which has the final say on the grant of the welfare benefit. But the report has already concluded that the declared activities of the fisherman do not match the reality of his livelihood, and so the application is rejected...

From the testimonies of the leaders, it can be noticed that INSS technicians are more familiar with the conditions of work in agriculture than in fisheries. Most of the official personnel have had their basic training in agriculture, making it difficult for them to recognize the specificities of the fisheries sector and fishing activities. According to a *colônia* leader from the coast of Pará:

Most of the social welfare officers have been prepared to interact with farmers. They are used to them, and all their training has been on conditions in agriculture...

In this regard, it is worth noting the complaint of the president of Viseu *colônia* about the absence of a category identification entry in the official forms to be filled in when applying for a welfare benefit:

I wish INSS would recognize the particularity of the fishermen. The INSS declaration forms have only the category 'rural'. It is important to valorize the word 'fisherman'.

All those interviewed wished for less bureaucratic red tape, which often leads to insurmountable problems, as in this example from a director of a Marajó Island *colônia*:

Once I tried to secure a benefit for a fisherman who had been sick for 10 months. He finally died without getting the benefit, and now his wife will probably get the widow's pension.

The director of CPP, a support organization, expresses similar difficulties:

There is the case of a fisherwoman who was a cancer patient for more than a year. From the beginning, she was trying for sickness welfare assistance. But she had to deal with the bureaucratic machinery of the government, which created a lot of obstacles. The fisherman goes to the government office and they ask him for a specific document. When he comes back with it, he is told another document is necessary. Instead, they should have given him a list of all the documents required, in the first place.

Another common complaint is about the delay in the release of welfare payments, particularly for the unemployment insurance scheme. Often the payment for the first month is released almost at the end of the four-month fishing closure period. This delay can jeopardize the purpose of the policy, which is to conserve species. The delay also explains why fishermen continue to fish illegally or fall back on complementary activities in agriculture or backyard farming.

5.5 Discriminatory attitudes

Discriminatory attitudes towards the fishing communities were frequently mentioned during the interviews. Besides being unfamiliar with fisheries

and fishing, the technicians of the welfare institution tend to share a stereotype image of fishworkers, as these testimonies show:

If a fisherman and a fisherwoman arrive [at the INSS bureau] with their hair combed and wearing clean clothes, they will be told that they don't need benefits because they seem to be in good health.

We have a very serious problem with INSS because it doesn't want to accept that the fisherman is a worker who is entitled to all the benefits. They want to ignore fishermen and fisherwomen, and that should not happen.

...as for the welfare service, sometimes the fisherman has difficulties communicating, and the technician talks to him in an accusatory manner.

Though these prejudices affect both men and women alike, documents and oral testimonies indicate that fisherwomen are more discriminated against.

6. Social Security and Gender Relations

Various studies on gender relations at work in Brazil have noticed a strong link between workers' participation in the labour market and social security coverage. Gender analysts indicate that the inequalities between men and women in the labour market are reproduced in the matter of social security access. This occurs because women more frequently occupy unsteady and difficult jobs, which are characterized by: (a) long working hours; (b) irregularity (as women have to juggle maternity and household chores as well); (c) informal markets; (d) high unemployment rates; and (e) low earnings. This has repercussions for social security access, as economist Lena Lavinas explains:

In general, women work intermittently, due to their family responsibilities. So they can contribute only irregularly to social security schemes. Hence, many women have outstanding amounts due to the INSS. They need to pay up the accumulated arrears before claiming retirement benefits at 60. Most of them, of course, can't afford these payments. The irregularity in their contributions forces them to retire later or, sometimes, even after having exceeded their contribution period.¹⁹

These characteristics are more visible in urban areas, since rural workers participate in the social security system with little or no contribution and do not need to pay periodically in proportion to their earnings. Even 13 years after the establishment of the law that guarantees social rights for rural workers, women rural workers — especially fisherwomen — still find it difficult to access social welfare schemes. Part of the reason is historical. Earlier, a fisherwoman could not be enrolled in a social security scheme as an individual unless she was the head of the household. From 1991 onward, after the new RGP Law was enacted, this right was extended to all working members of the family. Fisherwomen have thus acquired equal rights, independent of their fishermen husbands.

Nonetheless, their worker status is often not officially recognized for want of documentation. As previously explained, besides the *colônia's* declaration, other documents like children's school enrollment certificates, marriage certificate, receipts of credit purchases and hospital registration records are also important. However, in most such documents, the woman is often identified as merely a 'housewife', which renders her worker status invisible. Cultural practices, especially in rural areas and smaller cities, often fail to valorize her productive activity aimed at maintaining the household, and her family does not usually view her responsibilities as equivalent to a man's work. This is clearly expressed in these words of a fisherwoman and president of an association in the city of Vigia, in coastal Pará:

...earlier, people didn't know if they had any rights. The worker just worked, without knowing if he had any rights. Sometimes only men had rights. Women were particularly discriminated against. Even if the woman spent her whole life fishing and travelling, she often didn't know her rights.

Many fisherwomen complain of having to suffer prejudices within the INSS. These may be related to their physical appearance, backed by the stereotyped notion of a fisherwoman as a crude and unsophisticated person, leading to official scepticism about the genuineness of the candidate for welfare.

Old attitudes to women still prevail in several *colônias*, as the following testimony from the president of the Mosqueiro *colônia* clearly indicates:

As for the INSS, the fisherman first has to prove that he really is a fisherman, through the declaration of an organization, usually the *colônia*. It's a pity that many *colônias* do not recognize women

as fishworkers, making it hard for them to claim official retirement benefits. What harms them more, sometimes, is prejudice.

Some *colônias* in Pará, like the Barcarena *colônia*, have been raising women's awareness and encouraging them to assert their social security rights. In the last quarter of 2003, around 70 per cent of the *colônia*'s new associates were women.

Despite such progress, prejudices in recognizing women as genuine workers remain. The presidents of the Viseu and Icoaraci *colônias* in the northeast of the State describe the types of fishing women perform:

Women in Vizeu fish with lines, catch *sururu* [small mussels], and help their husbands in their daily fishing...

...the women get every kind of illness, often more than the men. Here in the islands [in the Tocantins river mouth], there are women who get up at two, three o'clock in the morning, go out in a small canoe on the river to inspect their *matapi* [fixed traps for shrimp], or collect the fish trapped in the *curral* [huge traps for fish, fixed at the edge of rivers or shores]. The woman does everything...

Overcoming the lack of recognition for women has not been an easy task, and it is only recently that fisherwomen have become somewhat more visible. Working throughout the year primarily in fish processing and repairing nets and gear, they have gradually been able to impose themselves in a male-dominant culture. The last decade also saw the establishment of some associations of fisherwomen in the State of Pará and elsewhere in Brazil. The 2003 SINE study found 60 entities dealing with fishing communities, of which 11 were women's associations and one, representing both women and men.

At the First Congress of Fishermen from the west of Pará and the Low Amazon region, in 2000, one of the demands made by participants was that women should have access to the benefits "every worker has the right to, without discrimination between men and women, irrespective of whether she carries out the fishing activity in a continuous way or not". It is important to recognize that the fisherwoman, because of her multifarious other activities, does not always fish continually or exclusively, and that fact should not disqualify her from receiving social security benefits.

The interviews also revealed how the financial resources from social security benefits go to maintain the fisherwoman's household. The money received may end up being used for other purposes. For example, maternity benefits that would allow the new mother to stop working for four months, or the retirement pension, are frequently employed to improve the means of production, as this testimony from the president of the Gurupá *colônia* shows:

I think it is the maternity assistance that the woman needs most. She can use the money to buy diapers and stuff for her children. There are some fisherwomen who tell me, "Now with this money I'm going to get my own *casco* [small canoe], my own net and *matapi* [trap for shrimps]." For them, it was a big thing.

7. The Role of Fishermen's Organizations in the Conquest of Social Welfare Benefits

There are various organizations in the state of Pará that support fishermen and try to help them with their demands. In January 2004, around 70 fishermen's *colônias* were established in Pará, and an equal number of local fishermen's associations, besides larger national organizations like Movimento de Pescadores do Baixo Amazonas (MOPEBAM), CPP, MOPEPA and MONAPE.

Some leaders believe that the social movements of fishermen and farmers have played an important role in what they regard as the 'conquest' of social security benefits. According to the president of a *colônia* in the northeast of the State:

It was necessary to create a social movement to wrest these benefits [social rights] and after these conquests, the *colônias* stayed at the frontline. They understood that it's necessary for them to be themselves present in the defence of the workers. However, INSS has been a little shy in granting benefits. So we have to constantly apply pressure.

In the 2003 SINE study, most of the presidents of *colônias*, when asked about their organization's achievements, almost always stressed unemployment insurance and social security as the two most important ones. It is remarkable that many of them also explicitly mentioned the maternity benefit as an important achievement. All the 22 leaders of

artisanal fishermen in the State interviewed for the study recognized their fundamental roles in gaining social welfare measures for their communities, as the testimonies of the presidents of the Barcarena *colônia* and the Mosqueiro *colônia*, reveal:

The role of the *colônia* is to organize and fight for the fishermen's rights, fight to get the rights, since they already have [the benefits]. Our role is also to make them aware, since many don't know their rights.

We help the fisherman prepare for the INSS, even if he isn't associated with the *colônia*. We do not impose any membership conditions, but help through information and knowledge. Afterwards, we hope, he'll understand the need for an association. We organize meetings at our *colônia*. This year, we organized more than 30 presentations at local communities.

Many *colônias* have begun to act as intermediaries between the fishermen and the public authorities, taking a more active part, arguing with official representatives, participating in mobilization meets, along with other categories of workers like small-scale farmers, and inviting technicians of the social welfare system and the Labour Ministry for local seminars and campaigns. The president of the Gurupá *colônia*, on the mouth of the Amazon river, recalls bringing training courses to the town. The testimony of the president of the Abaetetuba *colônia*, on the Tocantins river, highlights the common demands of the *colônias*:

We worked hard in this role, to guarantee these benefits. We prepared many legal propositions and I think our *colônia*, together with Cametá and Santarém *colônias*, contributed to the debate on how to improve the fishermen's lives. Debate meets were organized with the social security agency, with CUT [the central union of workers] and with other partner entities. They were held in Belem, Brasilia and here in our own town.²⁰

One of the current struggles of the fishermen's organizations relates to the reduction of the retirement age by five years for men and women, on account of occupational hazards, as Zacarias Silva of MOPEPA explains:

The other demand we are making is for the reduction of the age for retirement from 60 to 55 years for men, and from 55 to 50 for women. As long as fishing remains a risky activity, by the age of 40 or 50, at the most, the fisherman is in no condition to work any longer. When the fisherman retires at 60, the maximum he is going to get is another 10 years, before he dies, sometimes only five years.

In spite of such initiatives, deep-rooted positions and views remain, as reflected in this testimony of the president of Mosqueiro *colônia*:

We couldn't go further because we have had a history of corruption in our *colônia*, likewise other *colônias*, and these stories of corruption scared away many of our associates. [In the past] all the financial gains of the *colônia* were diverted for political purposes. Today we have only a headquarter and some goodwill for our work, but very few resources.

The president of the Vizeu *colônia* recalls a similar problem that affects the credibility of fishermen as a class: non-fishermen who try to enroll with the INSS, merely to gain access to social security benefits. This is one reason why the INSS distrusts the declarations given by the *colônias* about the professional affiliations of their members.

Many limitations still hamper the *colônias*. It is proving difficult to mobilize more members. Monthly payments are not timely, thus encouraging the entry of external political and economic interests. Some *colônia* leaders fall back on influential people, especially politicians, to underwrite current expenses or to transport members to hospital. The two quotes below, from *colônia* leaders in the northeast of Pará, are illustrative:

The *colônia* survives from the association's help and from the help of the councilwoman. If a fisherman in need arrives and seeks medicament, she helps by paying the cab fare to the hospital...

We direct our associates to the hospital; we have a deal with the deputy. She attends to us in her bureau²¹... It was during the elections that we worked for her. In exchange for our work, she has committed to assist our fishermen with x-rays, lab reports and hospital stay.

Despite the Brazilian social security system's attempt towards egalitarian access, in many cases, clientelism continues to enjoy favour. The reality contradicts the principles of welfare, as expressed, for example, by the Social Security Ministry in the introduction to the 2003 Guide for the Rural Worker: "To be assured of social security, and not become merely the beneficiary of an aid scheme, is a worthy achievement of the rural workers." This approach is reaffirmed by Schwarzer:

... the creation of a protection network that does not depend on alms or a relationship of favour between the rural worker and somebody outside. It's a benefit that he receives for his professional integrity, which gives him high self-esteem and pride. It doesn't reduce him to a second-category citizen.²²

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

Though the Brazilian social security system has made great progress and acquired universal contours by including every category of workers, in practice, it is still very far from being a truly widespread and egalitarian system. The social differences are significant in the public medical care services. Although legally accessible to everybody, budgetary limits restrain the supply of services, particularly those of a specialized medical nature. The public health infrastructure is unevenly distributed among the regions of the country and is concentrated in the bigger cities. Even in the relatively better-off urban centres, beneficiaries have to wait very long for healthcare.

As a result, the richer sections of Brazil's population are increasingly looking towards private health and social security plans. This is a far cry from the original motivation and subsequent evolution of the official social security system. It is possible to say that though the Brazilian 'welfare State' has clearly progressed, it has, at the same time, kept reproducing levels of stratification in society. Those who can pay for social services have better options and prompt access to healthcare. They can also complement the retirement benefits provided by the public system, with income from private retirement plans. Yet, these limitations should not detract from the significant achievements that Brazil's public social security policies have brought for those who need them the most, nor should we forget the income redistribution resulting from these policies.

Our study found the following as the primary barriers between artisanal fishing communities and social welfare benefits:

- *The shortage of public State institutions for delivery of social welfare measures*

The public network of social welfare service providers does not cover the entire territory, being particularly insufficient in the rural areas and smaller cities. The absence of such a network reinforces clientelism, forcing the fishermen to depend on favours, bosses, politicians or, even, *colônia* directors. The recent initiative of INSS to create a mobile service – the Prev-Móvel – that reaches distant localities, is laudable, but the service is still far from perfect.

- *The scarcity of public health infrastructure in fishing villages*

The lack of public health infrastructure in most fishing villages hinders fishermen from getting assistance for illnesses and accidents that require expert assessment by a doctor accredited with INSS. Forcing the fishermen to travel to an urban centre places additional burdens on the family, especially for the women who are invariably the ones to care for the needy.

- *Excessive bureaucracy*

A history of fraud in the Brazilian social security system has forced the government to increase bureaucratic control over the system. This creates problems in rural areas, particularly for the special insured persons, since they do not contribute financially to the system the way urban workers do.

- *Official ignorance of fisheries and fishing communities*

The social security technicians' lack of familiarity with fisheries and fishing practices generates misunderstandings that hamper the grant of welfare benefits. Ignorance of specific occupational illnesses also prevents the sanctioning of sickness assistance and invalidity retirement benefits.

- *Official discrimination against fishers, particularly fisherwomen*

The poor quality of the social welfare service is compounded by attitudes of distrust and stereotypes of fishing communities and fishworkers. Ill-qualified officers make the fishermen undertake several trips to apply for welfare benefits, forcing on them additional costs and lost workdays.

- *Ignorance about rights*

Most fishermen and fisherwomen know little about their rights and corresponding duties. Though they are entitled to a range of benefits,

their demands concentrate on retirement benefits and pensions—rights that have long been available in Brazil—and on the more recent maternity wage. They almost never apply for temporary benefits.

- *Lack of documentation*

The absence of personal and professional documentation and the difficulty in getting such documents are major problems. The low educational levels of the fishermen and fisherwomen worsen the situation, as does the time and distance needed to reach the welfare authorities concerned.

To conclude, despite its limitations, Brazil's social security system is regarded by the class organizations of fishermen and rural workers as a notable 'conquest' resulting from their mobilization. The leaders believe that the social movements of fishworkers and rural workers have played a key role in the acquisition of welfare benefits. Most leaders regard unemployment insurance and welfare rights as the most significant benefits for fishing communities.

In the 1990s, Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura (CONTAG, the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers) began a national movement called 'Land Cry', which presented the government with several crucial demands on matters ranging from technical assistance, credit and land reform to public policies concerning education, health and social welfare. In Pará State, fishworkers' movements like MONAPE and MOPEPA—with its local branches, MOPEBAM (from the Low Amazon municipalities) and MOPESAL (from the coastal municipalities)—joined hands with the larger national movement and included some of their own proposals in the charter of demands.

These relate to improved access to existing benefits and the broadening of the present range of benefits. CONTAG claims to want to 'humanize' the service in INSS agencies and local offices, to widen the mobile welfare service (Prev-Móvel) in the rural communities, and to increase the budget in order to offer good-quality services to the population. Several demands relate to the medical expertise offered by INSS in assessing welfare claims. According to CONTAG, the experts' reports should be well supported by evidence and made easily accessible and understandable for the rural worker.

On the matter of health, the demand is for mobile health services, and research into drug consumption in rural areas and its consequences. There

is also demand for free distribution of medicines to the aged and the handicapped. CONTAG has also called for a review of the World Health Organization International Classification of Diseases to include pathologies resulting from specific occupational conditions in agriculture, for example, exposure to toxic substances and the sun's rays.

In a letter presented to the Brazilian government during the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Conference in November 2003 in Brasilia, MOPEPA demanded the building of hospitals in the important municipalities of the State, which should also cover the riverside and coastal communities. It also demanded mobile health services, with boats equipped with doctors, nurses and medicines.

There have also been demands to increase the number of local INSS agencies and doctors, strengthen health infrastructure in rural areas, and hasten the process of welfare benefits for victims of accidents and illnesses. INSS also needs to take into account the difficulties that women face in proving their labour status; most often, their personal papers (marriage certificates, children's birth certificates, and so on) mention that they are housewives, without specifying an occupation, which leads to many difficulties in claiming social welfare benefits.

It is worth highlighting that MOPEPA, besides sharing the demands of CONTAG, has also called for a reduction of the retirement age, considering the risky conditions in fishing: from 60 years to 55, for men, and from 55 to 50, for women. It has also demanded the expansion of resource management to include new species.

The following measures will, directly or indirectly, improve the working and health conditions of fishing communities:

- Reduction of commercialization and reliance on middlemen
- Creation of additional job opportunities for women
- Establishment of women's police stations
- Introduction of fishing regulations for stock protection
- Design of legislation to protect the environment
- Crafting a housing policy for fishing communities
- Launch of literacy programmes
- Political valorization of fishworkers

The concern for fisheries resource management has been growing among the fishermen in Pará, since they have been directly observing reduced volumes and catch size. In this context, it is worth remembering one of the conclusions of a workshop on work conditions in fishing, in Trivandrum, India (ICSF, 2004, p.32): “A well-managed fishery is also the best form of social security, especially for the artisanal sector.”

The following quote sums up the expectations that exist today among Brazil’s fishing communities, particularly for a greater political visibility for artisanal, small-scale fishing communities:

For almost 300 or 500 years, we were despised, really, and now, with the shift in government, we have been capable of changing many things, but there still is a lot to do... The fisherman has to be viewed with more concern, love and dedication. He is someone who risks his life to bring food for his family, for the trader, for the industry and for the whole country...[President of Associação Livre dos Pescadores Artesanais de Cajueiro (ALPAC), the Free Association of Artisanal Fishermen of Cajueiro]

Endnotes

¹ IBAMA. 2003. Fishing Statistics 2001. Access, 10 March 2004. Available at <http://www.ibama.gov.br>

² Diegues, A.C. 1995. *Povos e mares: leituras em sócio-antropologia marítima*. São Paulo, NUPAUB-USP.

³ A fishing enterprise in Vigia has its own fishing fleet of 13 vessels, but maintains partnership with over 300 artisanal fishermen, from whom they acquire 30 per cent of the production. "ECOMAR takes Pará's fishing to the world market." *O Liberal*, Belém, 28 March 2004.

⁴ SINE-PA. 2003. *A pesca artesanal no Pará: perfil sócio-econômico e organizacional dos pescadores filiados às colônias*. Belém, SETEPS/SINE-PA.

⁵ A little over half the State's production in 1996 and 1997 came from coastal towns, from Belém to Vizeu, including the fishing harbours of Salvaterra and Soure, in Marajó Island.

⁶ Named after the official who proposed it.

⁷ Available at <http://www.mre.gov.br>.

⁸ Urban workers in the formal sector had already been enjoying this benefit since the 1930s.

⁹ This system composed six basic entities: INAMPS (for medical assistance); IAPAS (for social security administration); INPS (for social security benefits); LBA (for social assistance); FUNABEM (for assistance to minors); and DATAPREV (for data processing).

¹⁰ For example, contributions from corporate profits; Finsocial and Cofins; the Employees Fund administered by the Labour Ministry, etc..

¹¹ SINE is a federal programme operating like a public employment agency; it is also the channel for unemployment insurance and capacity-enhancing courses for job redeployment.

¹² "Excesses threaten four species of fishes." *O Liberal*, Belém, 29 February 2004, p. 9. This article mentions the danger of a "commercial extinction" of the *pescada amarela*, *gurijuba*, *serra* and *pargo* species (the last, a target of industrial fishing, while the first three are common in the regional market).

¹³ Drude, R. H. *Tiradores de caranguejo: o trabalho 'sacrificoso' no manguezal*. Postgraduate dissertation presented to the Postgraduation Programme in Amazon Family Agricultures/NEAF/UFPA, 2003.

¹⁴ Interview by M. Cristina Maneschy, 17 November 2001, for SINE-PARÁ.

¹⁵ CPF is the Physical Individual Register, which has the identification number registered with the federal authorities in Brazil, and which is obligatory for every citizen, regardless of whether s/he pays taxes or not. It is a document as much in demand as an ID card, though it doesn't replace it.

¹⁶ The largest rodent in South America.

¹⁷ A palm tree typical of the Amazon estuary wetlands, whose fruit is processed into a nourishing beverage.

¹⁸ A kind of manioc.

¹⁹ Cited in the article "Social security is very unfair to Brazilian women", by Fausto Oliveira and published in *News from FASE* (Federação de Órgãos para Assistência Social e Educacional), 21 May 2004. Fragment translated from the Portuguese by the authors of this study.

²⁰ CUT is the principal central national trade union for different categories of workers. It was founded in 1983 at the start of the re-democratization of the country.

²¹ The deputy, in this case, is also a doctor.

²² Schwarzer, H. "Previdência Social redistribui renda". *Jornal Folha de S. Paulo*, 7 de julho de 2003.

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This study explores the status of Brazil's social welfare system for the fisheries sector, from the point of view of democratization of access, the methodologies used and the extent to which demands have been taken into account. Brazil's social welfare system is currently the focus of restructuring programmes by the government, which aim to reduce the growing 'deficits' of the system. Reductions in the scope of benefits can be expected from the ongoing reforms. Though the Brazilian social security system has made great progress and acquired universal contours by including every category of workers, in practice, it is still very far from being a truly widespread and egalitarian system.



ICSF is an international NGO working on issues that concern fishworkers the world over. It is in status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN and is on ILO's Special List of Non-Governmental International Organizations. It also has Liaison Status with FAO. Registered in Geneva, ICSF has offices in Chennai, India, and Brussels, Belgium. As a global network of community organizers, teachers, technicians, researchers and scientists, ICSF's activities encompass monitoring and research, exchange and training, campaigns and action, as well as communications.

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