

Fishers' movement

Towards a global force

The following is based on an interview with Jose Alberto de Lima Ribeiro of Brazil's national movement of fishers

According to Jose Alberto de Lima Ribeiro, a fisherman from the community of Prainha do Canto Verde, the State of Ceará, Brazil, there are several issues facing the Brazilian artisanal fisheries, which are also causing the decline of fish resources. These are, mainly, (1) poor fisheries management; (2) lack of scientific studies on various species of commercial importance; and (3) lack of dissemination of the results of such research.

Ribeiro feels that Brazilian fishers are still using craft and gear that are not the most appropriate for the capture of the predominant species. They would like to find a way to improve the technology of their fishing vessels and gear so that they become more efficient, both in terms of environmental sustainability and in terms of fish catch.

Some of the gear that they currently use are not environment friendly, says Ribeiro. For example, lobsters can be caught both by bottom-set gillnets, which harm benthic organisms and substrata, and by lobster traps, which are environmentally friendlier and probably give the fishers and consumers a better-quality final product.

However, the market makes no distinction between lobsters caught by these two capture techniques, and the fishermen get almost the same price for both. This lack of incentive to use selective fishing methods should be addressed, Ribeiro feels. There should be efforts to improve gear to give more value to the catch, while ensuring less of a harmful environmental impact.

Importantly, says Ribeiro, it has to be borne in mind that the culture of the typical Brazilian fisherman is not always

in favour of the sustainability of fishery resources. Typically, they may not think much about the future of the resources, and would go out and capture everything they can get. Therefore, they end up bringing in fish that is not the right size. They may not take the best care of the habitats on which they will continue to draw their livelihoods. This is compounded by the incentives that they receive from commercial exporters for exploiting fishery resources. The commercial exporters, whose motive is only production to make more profits, finance the fishers to take everything from the sea, irrespective of the season and size and quality of the resource. Such incentives force the fishermen to fish in a more exploitative manner, even if they are basically content to catch for subsistence.

Brazil's national movement of fishers, Movimento Nacional de Pescadores (MONAPE), is demanding from the government, effective enforcement of the fisheries laws that already exist in Brazil, says Ribeiro. This would strengthen the artisanal fishers' situation and allow them to continue their way of fishing. MONAPE is also demanding assistance for fishers who are ready to move to a more selective type of gear that is environmentally sound and less damaging to habitats and resources.

MONAPE is also looking at the prospect of establishing marine protected areas for sustainable exploitation, in which fishermen become part of the design and implementation, and benefit from the results of better protection of resources.

Better protection

Another critical problem faced by artisanal fisheries in Brazil is the lack of organized groups of fishermen and fisherwomen. There are several separate

efforts, and a great deal of energy is wasted in these separate efforts.

If such individual efforts could be consolidated, Ribeiro feels, it would give the fishers more power to enter into sustained and meaningful dialogue with the government, which will be forced to listen to their concerns and address them. Such an organization of fisher movements is critical, and MONAPE is leaving no stone unturned to gather all these different initiatives under one umbrella so as to make the fishers and the communities they represent, strong enough to face the government.

One area where the fishing community has been found completely lacking is education. As a consequence, MONAPE is planning to take up educational campaigns for fishers and their families.

The primary objective is to make the community aware of the linkage between the nature and health of the ecosystem and their own livelihoods. This would help them understand the necessity to protect the resources and habitats on which they depend. MONAPE's campaign will aim for better educational and training material for capacity building, information gathering, and dissemination of related knowledge.

Another huge challenge that MONAPE faces is to create awareness about the importance of the role women play in the

artisanal fishery sector. Even though there are only a few women who actually go out and fish, most of the post-harvest processing and preparation of gear are carried out by women. MONAPE would like to flag this issue and make people aware of women's role in fisheries.

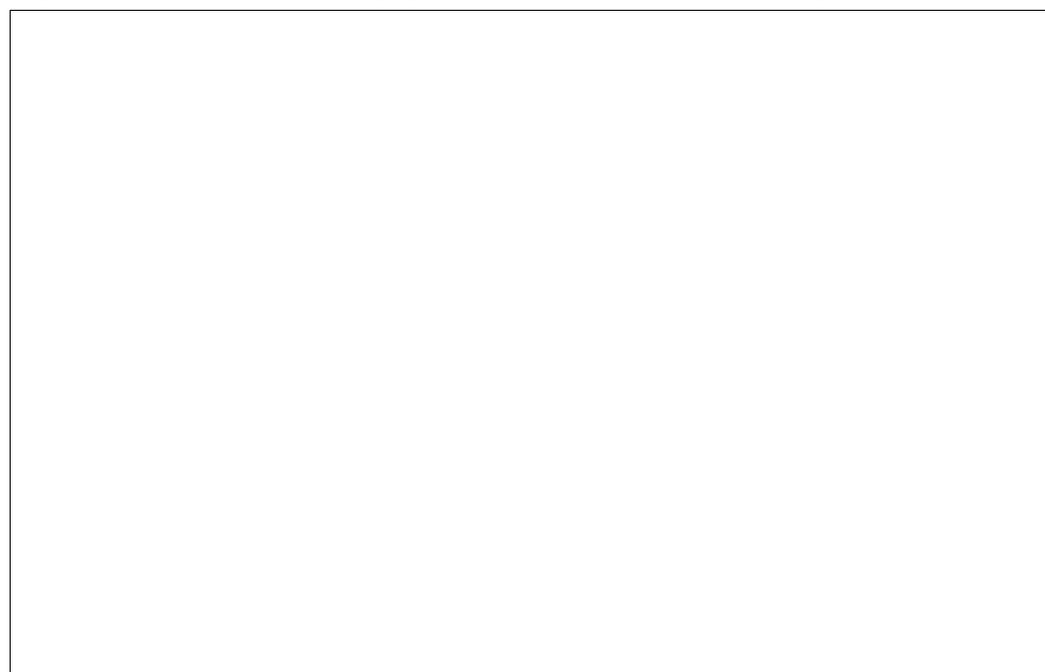
On the value and strength of international meetings like the one on "Emerging Concerns of Fishing Communities" conducted by ICSF at Fortaleza, Brazil, in July 2006, Ribeiro felt that sharing of issues and common concerns result in lessons and experiences that are valuable for fishing communities.

Ribeiro feels that such collaborations are improving every day and there will be more joint efforts with some of these organizations to deal with these issues.

According to Ribeiro, for all its work, MONAPE seeks support primarily from the government. It is represented in various councils of the government. It also seeks local State-level support to carry out its campaigns. It has already benefited from co-operation with the government in some campaigns. Much depends on how well-organized the movement is, and how strongly it can put up its case for co-operation and support.

Existing realities

MONAPE, says Ribeiro, is keen to know, in more detail, about the existing realities in the fisheries of other parts of the world. It



would also like to discuss the pros and cons of different ideas and proposals that have been brought out at the ICSF Fortaleza meeting, to analyze various aspects of the issues, and see how MONAPE can join hands with kindred organizations from different parts of the world, who face similar problems, so that they can constitute a global initiative and force. ¶

This interview with Jose Alberto de Lima Ribeiro was done in Fortaleza, Brazil, by Neena Koshy (icsf@icsf.net), Programme Associate, ICSF