

Building on a new concept

The recent ICSF workshop at Madras helped participants grapple with the concept of Coastal Area Management (CAM)

Organized by ICSF in Madras between 26 September and 1 October 1996, the four-day Workshop, followed by a two-day Symposium, brought together social activists, representatives of fishworker and other people's organizations from India, Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka, as well as representatives of international organizations like the FAO,

The Symposium was attended, apart from the Workshop participants, also by representatives of the governments of Sri Lanka, Maldives and India. Individual presentations and panel discussions during the meeting were followed by discussions in small groups and plenaries.

The Workshop was structured to facilitate the best possible participation and interaction. Since the group was diverse, and participants were knowledgeable on different issues, every effort was made to draw upon the resources within the group. The primary emphasis was on providing the space for participants to share their experiences, and to discuss their views on the conceptual and practical dimensions of Coastal Area Management (CAM) from the perspective of the fishery sector.

The Symposium that followed facilitated a dialogue between Workshop participants and representatives of governments in the South Asian region. It provided an opportunity to appraise policymakers about the concerns of the artisanal fisheries sector on issues related to habitat degradation and CAM.

The Workshop programme was kept flexible enough to respond to the issues raised by the participants. There were eight main sessions. At the same time, slots were also provided for participants

to meet and discuss regional linkages and strategies on issues of common concern.

In the first session, a representative from each country present provided an overview of coastal area issues within that country's context. This was followed by presentations from fishworker representatives describing problems in their specific coastal areas. This session, in a sense, set the agenda for the rest of the programme.

In the second session on fisheries-coastal zone interactions, participants split into groups to discuss and explore, among other things, the complexity and fragility of the coastal ecosystem, the threats to the coastal environment, the need for initiatives in CAM, the form of such initiatives, and the possible role fishworker organizations can play in this process. The plenary that followed tried to evolve a framework that reflected the issues raised in this session.

The third session stressed the importance of viewing natural resource issues in conjunction with those of property rights. Most countries accord greater sanctity to private property. Common property regimes are rarely recognized by the state, though they remain viable to manage natural resources.

Fourth session

The fourth session focused on fisheries management in the context of CAM. Management issues that stem from within the fishery sector have traditionally been addressed by fishery management institutions.

However, some coastal area problems affecting fishery resources are generated outside the sector, as, for instance, industrial pollution. CAM programmes

CAM in South Asia

Except for Maldives, the countries in the South Asian region face serious problems of coastal area degradation. Some attempts to deal with these have been made by countries in the region.

In India, coastal area degradation is acute, primarily due to industrial expansion, proliferation of urban settlements, growth of fertilizer and pesticide-intensive agriculture and aquaculture, as well as destruction of fragile coastal habitats. The Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification issued by the state in 1991 makes some attempts at regulating developmental activities along a narrow, 500m strip of coastal land. Maximum controls apply to ecologically sensitive areas.

Significantly, the notification recognizes the traditional and customary rights to settlement, such as of fishing villages. States have been required, by law, to develop coastal zone management plans, and to specify and authority at the state level responsible for enforcement and monitoring of provision under this notification.

Progress has been tardy and state plans are yet to be finalized. The notification itself has several problematic areas. It completely lacks a seaward component. At the same time, by specifying a uniform strip all along the Indian coast as the coastal zone, it fails to recognize and respond to regional variation in coastal ecosystems as well as the specificities of resource management issues. It also fails to recognize linkages between activities in inland areas and degradation in coastal areas.

While it is true that India possesses other legislation which aims at, for instance, management of fishery resources in coastal areas, controlling pollution from industries, and so on, the focus of each is very specific and sectoral. There is not comprehensive legislation, which attempts to harmonize existing legislation and address environmental issues in coastal areas in a holistic manner.

In Maldives, environmental degradation has become an issue in recent years, with economic and urban development. Since the country depend for its very existence on the fragile coral reef ecosystem, any threat to its coastal resources could have serious and immediate consequences. Moreover, both

tourism and fisheries, economically the most important sectors in Maldives, depend on coastal resources and on a healthy coastal environment. In order to preserve its reef resources, a programme for the integrated management of reef resources has recently been initiated. For a country like Maldives, composed of small, scattered islands sustained by a dynamic and living base of coral, it is the concept of reef management rather than coastal management that has far more relevance.

A large part of Bangladesh is low-lying and the influence of the sea is felt even in inland areas, through tidal and wave action. The livelihood strategies of people in coastal areas have been adapted around this reality. There has been a symbiotic and complementary relationship between agriculture and fisheries.

However, the focus on the development of agriculture as a sector, without taking into consideration other environmental factors and interlinkages, has affected this relationship. To prevent saline inundation and, thereby, to increase agricultural production, construction of coastal embankments was undertaken in the period after the late 1960s. Important fish breeding and spawning grounds were destroyed.

The proposed Flood Action Plan for Bangladesh is likely to have the same effect. The rapid growth of export-oriented aquaculture has also led to significant destruction of coastal habitats, important for sustaining fisheries, and has generated tremendous social conflict among coastal communities. Bangladesh has not, however, adopted a holistic management plan.

Sri Lanka's coastal management programme now has a history of fifteen years. A specific agency, the Coast Conservation Department, has been created to handle all matters related to coastal conservation. While the programme was initially adopted in response to the serious problems of coastal erosion, efforts are now on to evolve a second-generation coastal management strategy to deal comprehensively with other coastal management issues. The focus is on the creation of Special Area Management Programmes in areas facing serious problems related to the coastal environment.

can potentially provide the space for fishery departments to play a role in their management. In the fifth session, a comparative view of coastal area degradation, and initiatives in coastal area management by countries in the South Asian region, was presented.

A panel discussion on aquaculture brought out the disastrous environmental, social and economic consequences of the spread of export-oriented aquaculture in South Asia, despite which governments of the region continue to promote it. The session also highlighted the strong links between aquaculture and industrial fisheries. In another panel discussion, representatives from among the Workshop participants presented their views on the institutional, legal and policy dimensions of CAM.

The final session of the Workshop provided information on international instruments of relevance to fisheries and CAM, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), The FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

The Symposium which followed was a more public affair, with participation from several local persons representing the state government and organizations within Madras. Presentations at the inaugural session brought out the

relevance of the FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries for CAM and fisheries management, and for fishworkers' organizations. Successes in the implementation of Integrated Coastal Area Management programmes in various parts of the world were also highlighted.

Government representatives from Sri Lanka, India and Maldives provided information on CAM initiatives in their countries. Unfortunately, the Government of Bangladesh was not represented. The report from the earlier Workshop was also presented during the Symposium. The concluding panel discussion focused on issues related to defending the interests of fishing communities in the coastal zone.

The meeting ended with a vow to continue the process of learning, campaigning, struggling, sharing and mutual support initiated and fostered by the Workshop and Symposium. ¶

This report was written by
Chandrika Sharma, Programme
Associate at ICSF's Madras Office