

## Forging unity

**This is the prospectus of the forthcoming conference on the Indian Ocean Region, organized by ICSF and International Ocean Institute**

**T**he Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean in the world. Encompassing the body of water between Africa, the Southern Ocean, Asia and Australia, it provides the earliest evidence of human adaptation to the marine environment.

The Indian Ocean, after the Pacific, accounts for the largest number of commercial marine species and for the largest share of full-time fishers' population in the world.

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has the largest small-scale, artisanal fisheries in the world. The wide variety of craft-gear combinations employed to catch hundreds of marine species is the hallmark of the region. Fish is a culturally important food as well as a source of employment, income and foreign exchange. The IOR produces significant quantities of fish, both for the domestic and the export markets. Tuna and tuna-like species form the bulk of fish production in the Indian Ocean, with about 19 species contributing to about 20 per cent of the total fish catch.

According to the FAO, a quarter of the world's tuna production is from the Indian Ocean and its adjacent seas. Half the catch is believed to come from the artisanal and small-scale fisheries, while in other oceans most of the tuna catches are netted by industrial vessels. The IOR also produces large quantities of shrimp and cephalopods.

While species like tuna, shrimp and cephalopods are mainly exported, accounting for an important source of foreign exchange, smaller pelagics, which account for the largest bulk of production, are, in general, locally consumed and are the most important source of vital nutrition for the poor. Between 1950 and

1998, the population of the IOR doubled from less than one billion to two billion. Over the same period, marine fish production increased eight-fold—from less than 1 mn tonnes to about 8 mn tonnes. It is significant that while the Indian Ocean population remained at 40 per cent of the world total during this period, the share of Indian Ocean marine fish catch to the world catch increased from under five per cent to about 10 per cent. The potential of the fishery to contribute to the overall well being of the IOR is, therefore, well evident.

Despite this significant increase in fish production, the open-access nature of the marine fishing ground has led to the overexploitation of fisheries resources within three nautical miles in almost all IOR countries. However, according to the FAO, while most of the fishing areas in the world have reached their maximum potential for capture fisheries production, there is still potential for production increases in the eastern and western Indian Ocean, in waters beyond the littoral sea. There is, therefore, a need to ensure that the Indian Ocean does not follow the example of other ocean areas, with respect to poor resource conservation and management. This implies improvements in international agreements, better quality monitoring and control, supported by improvements in the quality of data and compatible institutional arrangements at the national and regional levels.

### **More poor people**

From a human development point of view, the Indian Ocean has the largest number of people living below the income poverty line of US\$1 a day. Madagascar, Mozambique, Kenya, India and Bangladesh, for example, have significant shares of their total populations living

## Objectives

Keeping in mind this background and the array of issues relevant to the coastal fishing communities, ICSF, in collaboration with the International Ocean Institute, will hold an international meet in Chennai, India from 9 to 13 October, 2001 with the following objectives:

- to create an awareness among the participants about the bio-geographical and cultural unity of the riparian communities of the IOR;
- to highlight the importance of sustaining the livelihoods of the artisanal and small-scale fishing communities dependent on marine fisheries in the emerging context of new developments in fisheries in the IOR;
- to forge greater unity between communities to:
  - advocate for participatory regional and bilateral arrangements among the riparian nations of the IOR for access to, and responsible management of, fisheries resources, consistent with the UNCLOS;
  - discuss mechanisms for conflict resolution and conflict reduction in the IOR and for humane treatment of fishworkers; and
  - develop a shared vision statement for responsible utilization of fishery and coastal resources in the IOR.

below this line. Judged against the Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme, the most disadvantaged countries in the region are Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania, Yemen, and Bangladesh.

### Issues

Countries in the region share a long heritage of coastal fishing, seafaring and maritime trading that persists today. As indicated above, artisanal and small-scale fisheries provide the mainstay of the fisheries sector, both in terms of employment and catches.

With widespread poverty and underdevelopment in the region, and with significant dependence on fishery resources for food and livelihoods, artisanal and small-scale fisheries could make a vital contribution to the region's long-term development.

However, for this to happen, a number of trends must be addressed and remedied in ways that promote the sustainability of the Indian Ocean fisheries resources. Also, and more than ever before, some of the fisheries management issues are acquiring a regional dimension and, therefore, require a 'community' approach to management—an approach that involves all nations with their principal stakeholders in the IOR.

Based on discussions with some of the key policymakers, NGOs and fishworker organizations, the main issues identified are summarized below:

### Modernization and Expansion of Fisheries

There is evidence all over the IOR of depletion of resources and overcrowding of inshore fishing grounds.

The increasing availability of small-scale, modern fishing technologies, such as outboard engines, fibre-reinforced plastic boats, hand-held Global Positioning System (GPS) receivers and so forth, have contributed to fishers in the artisanal and small-scale fisheries in several Indian Ocean countries moving out of their traditional fishing grounds, and also fishing more intensively.

### Growing Conflicts

Previously, conflicts in coastal waters may have been exacerbated by large-scale industrial fishing vessels or bottom-trawling units moving into the inshore waters.

However, today, there seems to be a change in the direction of the conflicts. They are often precipitated by the artisanal, small-scale (gillnet and longline/handline gear groups) moving out into fishing grounds more usually the preserve of large-scale industrial fishing

vessels, or into the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of other countries. The conflicts have expanded in scope and scale.

**T**he trans-border illegal movement of fishing vessels amongst riparian nations is more pronounced amongst the South Asian and South East Asian countries and between the South Asian and island countries in the Indian Ocean. There are reported cases, which are on the increase, of Indian fishing vessels being apprehended in Sri Lanka, Maldives, Pakistan and Myanmar; of Sri Lankan fishing vessels being apprehended in India, Seychelles, Somalia and Myanmar; of Pakistani fishing vessels being apprehended in India, Oman and Iran; and of Thai vessels being apprehended in India, Bangladesh and Myanmar, for fishing illegally.

Irrespective of the size, nature and origin of the fishing unit—whether or not they are small or big, use destructive or passive gear, belong to riparian or non-riparian nations—countries in the region deal more stringently with illegal fishing by foreign fishing vessels than with irresponsible fishing by their own domestic fishing vessels.

#### **Distant-water Issues**

Under access agreements, joint ventures or licensing arrangements, non-riparian fishing (or distant-water) vessels can access tuna and a few other resources of

the riparian fishing nations in the IOR. In 1998, according to FAO statistics, about 400,000 tonnes of fish were caught by non-riparian fishing nations in the IOR. Most of this comprised high-value tuna resource.

There are, however, no such arrangements at the regional or bilateral level amongst the riparian nations within the Indian Ocean. A regional mechanism to address conflicts over access to fisheries resources as well as fisheries conservation and management issues is important, taking into account the human dimension associated with fleet migration between countries in the region.

The absence of agreements or procedures to handle expeditiously and humanely the problem of fishermen arrested for poaching often results in the gross violation of the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which clearly discourages incarceration as punishment for poaching.

#### **External Threats: IUU**

While addressing the 'endogenous' development needs of the IOR in the realms of fisheries, it is also important to take into account 'external' threats to fisheries in the region. The illegal, unregulated, unreported (IUU) fishing activities, especially by non-riparian nations or fishing entities in the IOR, for example, have significant implications for



the development of fisheries of the riparian nations, particularly the status of targeted and dependent stocks.

**T**he conditions of work of the crew on board these distant-water fishing vessels raise important labour and human rights issues.

#### **Coastal Environmental Degradation**

The health of the marine environment has an important bearing on fisheries management and the allocation of access rights to fisheries resources. The implications of degraded marine ecosystems include a decline in resource productivity and health risks to both fishers and consumers. Marine pollution and ineffective coastal area management (mangrove destruction, construction of large dams, etc.) impose significant external costs on coastal fisheries. The solution to the degradation of the marine environment also requires a regional, or community-oriented, approach.

#### **Regionalization Initiatives: the rise of the IOR-ARC**

The Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation (IOR-ARC), was formed in 1997 by 14 riparian States in the region. The IOR-ARC has aspirations to become like the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Its aims are: *'to promote sustained growth, balanced development, liberalization and to foster closer*

*co-operation in global economic issues and human resources development'*.

At the same time, non-governmental organizations from seven Indian Ocean countries formed a Civil Society Indian Ocean Network (CSIONET). The CSIONET has as its objective *'sustainable development, economic progress, participatory democracy and environmental equity in the Indian Ocean region'*. The CSIONET hopes to function as a dialogue partner with the IOR-ARC.

A proposal on conservation of fish resources in the Indian Ocean region was approved at the IOR-ARC's Ministerial Conference held at Muscat, Oman, in April 2001. IOR-ARC also aims at maximizing the benefits of globalization to the Indian Ocean rim countries. This could lead to an expansion of industrial and service sector activities in the coastal areas, which could have significant positive and negative implications for the coastal marine environment and the livelihood of people who are dependent on it.

At the sectoral level, the establishment of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) in 1996, with the objective of optimum utilization of 16 tuna and tuna-like fish in the IOR, is also highly significant. The IOTC has management powers and it is the first of its kind among the regional fisheries organizations under the FAO Constitution. With the likelihood

of the imminent ratification of the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreements, regional fisheries management organizations (like the IOTC) will become quite powerful. IOTC already has provisions to allow NGO participation at its meetings, if member countries do not object.

**T**he Conference will invite at least two representatives of artisanal fishing communities or fishworker organizations from a selected number of countries in the region. There will also be representatives of regional and international organizations, as well as of national fisheries agencies.

Following are the countries/ organizations from which participants are expected: Southern and Eastern Africa : Mozambique, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa; Western Indian Ocean: Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and Maldives; South East Asia: Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand; South Asia: India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh; and Australia; International Civil Society Organizations: Greenpeace International, WWF and CFFA; International Trade Unions: ITF; Multilateral Agencies: FAO, BOBP, EC, IOR-ARC, IOTC, SADC and ILO. 3

The conference, *Forging Unity: Coastal Communities and the Indian Ocean's Future*, will be held at the Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai, India, from 9 to 13 October 2001. For more details, email [icsf@vsnl.com](mailto:icsf@vsnl.com)