

Fair and Sustainable Fishing Shares?

Community-allocated access rights assigned to organizations of small-scale fishers could well address some of the concerns of artisanal and small-scale fishing communities

Over 20 years ago, *SAMUDRA Report* saw fishing quotas as an attempt by the industrial fleet to take over marine living resources traditionally caught by small-scale and artisanal fishers (see “Flashback”, page 52). Individual and collective fishing quotas are now employed in manifold forms in several countries not only to allocate fishing opportunities, but, ostensibly, also to reduce overcapacity and overfishing. In the case of collective quotas, one objective is to take account of the vulnerability of small-scale fisheries in the face of competition from industrial fishing, and to ring-fence their fishing rights.

But quota management systems (QMS) may also cause adverse environmental, social and economic effects. In multi-species fisheries, QMS may be the unwitting cause of high discard rates, for example. They may bestow wealth and opportunity on those relatively few individuals lucky enough to be allocated quota, while skewing social and economic relations in fishing communities in favour of vessel owners, against the interests of crew members, other fishery workers and stakeholders, notably women.

In his article “Anger and Angst” (page 4), Zeke Grader contrasts QMS experiences in the United States (US). In the mid-Atlantic surf clam fishery, quotas have got concentrated among a few large processors, while the fishermen-designed system in the halibut and blackcod fisheries in Alaska requires that most of the quota be held by those fishing on board. Grader claims this has led to safer fishing operations, enhanced the landed value of fish, and spread fish production across the season.

Grader then draws attention to the potential of community fishing quotas as authorized by the US Congress under the rubric of ‘catch shares’ in 2006. This allows for community fishing associations (CFAs)—comprising working fishing women and men, processors and others within a community—to be provided with quotas so as to preserve their access to traditional fisheries. Despite their potential benefits, Grader warns, CFAs are unlikely to take root unless the government or others purchase the quotas that were supposed to have been allocated initially. Only such CFAs can protect fishing communities’ economic, social and cultural stake in their fishery.

The impending introduction of transferable fishing rights as ‘transferable fishing concessions’ in

the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) of the European Union is discussed by Yann Yvergniaux in his article, “Catch Shares Razzmatazz” (page 29). Such an introduction could have perverse effects: the transfer of rights from small-scale to industrial fisheries; concentration of fishing rights in the hands of a few; decimation of fishing communities; demise of small-scale artisanal fisheries; and corporate control of fisheries.

Given these conflicting perspectives, can QMS, be crafted to secure sustainable artisanal fisheries, to minimize perversity and maximize equity? Or are QMS, after all, a zero-sum game for artisanal and small-scale fishers?



If the 2006 US schema for community quotas was applied in the right way, it might address some of the principal concerns of artisanal and small-scale fishing communities about the concentration of quota ownership in countries where QMS are already introduced. Under certain conditions, community quotas might help adapt

quota based fisheries management regimes to benefit artisanal and small-scale fishing communities for instance, if allocated to owner-operator fishers’ associations or to co-operatives employing passive and selective fishing gears, to crew unions, or to groups of shore-based fishers without a vessel, and with strict rules governing their transfer, working conditions and safety of fishing.

Such initiatives, however, underscore the importance of dynamic and secure governance structures, in which fishers, both men and women and their communities play an active part. In the absence of functioning co-operatives or associations of fishers and fishing communities, it is difficult to foresee successful community quotas that would remain with the designated communities in the long run.

Once effective institutional structures are developed, subsidies could be granted to community associations to purchase quotas to protect their interests in fisheries, as Grader argues.

Today, when ocean space is increasingly in demand, not only by industrial fishing but also by other conflicting interest such as oil and gas exploration and exploitation, wind farms, mariculture, and so on, could secure community fishing rights, possibly under an equitable QMS regime, protect the interests of coastal fishing communities?