

Fighting against Ruin

Soe Win, Chairman of the Fisher Development Association (FDA), Myanmar, was interviewed during his visit to India in late April 2015

Belonging to Ahseekalay Village, Pyapon Tsp, in the Ayeyarwaddy Region of Myanmar, Soe Win, who is Chairman of the the Fisher Development Association (FDA), spent time with *SAMUDRA Report* during the India-Myanmar exchange visit programme organized by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF).

The exposure visit was organized to allow representatives of fishing communities and civil society organizations from Myanmar and India to exchange experiences and ideas about issues related to fisheries.

in Myanmar, the organization he represents (FDA), and the issues currently being faced by the association and the small-scale fishing community in Myanmar.

The following is a paraphrased version of the interview:

Pyapon District in the Ayeyarwaddy region is located in a delta area, with around 70 per cent of the population living in rural areas and depending on the agriculture and fishery sectors for their livelihood. Around 30 per cent of the population depend on agriculture while the rest rely on fisheries and seasonal jobs.

The area has two types of fisheries—inland and marine. Most of the small-scale fishermen work in the inland fishery while the marine fishery is controlled by rich businessmen who also employ some small-scale fishermen as labour.

There are three types of fishing grounds in the inland fishery—leasable fishing areas, tendered fishing areas and common fishing grounds. The first two types are auctioned off by the government and few small-scale fishermen can access these fishery areas. The businessmen who buy the leasable and tendered fishing areas often re-sell parts of them to small-scale fishermen at higher prices.

Increased membership

In 2012 the FDA comprised fisher representatives from 41 villages of the Pyapon and Daydyae townships. Membership has increased gradually and FDA currently has 1,646 members from 71 villages. The association is organized with a cluster of villages at the base, aggregating to the township

Around 30 per cent of the population depend on agriculture while the rest rely on fisheries and seasonal jobs.

The programme was conducted over 10 days, from 21 to 30 April 2015. The principal objective was to see if lessons and experiences from the situation in India could help to promote the good governance process in the fishery sector of Myanmar.

The exchange programme was designed to study how small-scale fisher associations and federations could be strengthened institutionally, to understand the involvement of local governance institution in fisheries management and other social-development measures for fishing communities, and to analyze the role of small-scale fishery enterprises in the fishery value chain.

Soe Win shared his views on the fishing village he comes from, the situation of small-scale fisheries

*This interview with **Soe Win** was conducted during the India-Myanmar exchange programme for small-scale fishers during 21 to 30 April 2015, by **Yin Nyein** (helloyinnyein@gmail.com) and **Thant Zin Phyoo** (thantzinphyoo7@gmail.com), Network Activities Group (NAG), Myanmar*

and district levels, where different committees manage the affairs. All the representatives come from villages and each village has to nominate three representatives to the FDA.

Principally, the three main objectives of the FDA are to:

- improve policies that support the sustainable livelihood activities of small-scale fishers, protect their livelihood and fishing rights, and balance resource conservation and government revenue generation;
- ensure fair economic returns from small-scale fisheries production and work for diversification of livelihood opportunities; and
- enhance natural resource conservation so as to ensure the sustainability of small-scale fisheries operations and community livelihoods.

In pursuit of these objectives, the FDA has implemented the following activities and programmes:

- submitted a petition to the Ayeyarwaddy Regional Parliament, through parliamentarians, with the purpose of improving fishery policies;
- organized Fishery Forums at the district and regional levels to secure the rights of small-scale fishers;
- raised awareness of fisheries policies, rules and regulations among small-scale fishing communities;
- generated technical and financial supporting for small-scale aquaculture and fisheries activities;
- aided small-scale fishers to collectively tender applications to the regional government;
- provided loans to individuals and groups of small-scale fish gleaners;
- networked with other fisher organizations and took the lead to organize the Ayeyarwaddy Region Small-scale Fisher Network;
- raised awareness among small-scale fishers of the need for natural resource conservation; and
- facilitated a pilot fishery co-management programme in Daydyae township and helped spread awareness of co-management among small-scale fishing communities in other areas.



Soe Win, from Ahseekalay village in Pyapon District in the Ayeyarwaddy region of Myanmar, is Chairman of the Fisher Development Association (FDA)

Soe Win points out several issues and concerns that face the small-scale fishing communities in Myanmar today. Their participation in fisheries-related matters is poor due to a limited understanding of the importance of conservation and community-based resource management and fisheries development. The skills and capacities of individual committee members remain poor and need to be strengthened. Committee members often find it difficult to take time off from their livelihood activities for community development activities. They are also reluctant to accept accountability for their roles and responsibilities. Adding to these problems, support is lacking from government departments in co-ordinating and collaborating on development programmes. Meanwhile, fisheries resources continue to be depleted due to environmental neglect of the ecosystem, which is in danger of going to ruin. ❗

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