

Fishworker Organizations' sites

Weaving the Net

Fishworker organizations need to show that they need to better utilize the power and reach of the Internet through well-designed pages

Fishworker Organizations (FOs) are increasingly realizing the potential and power of the Internet as a tool for communication. Compared to other means of communication, the Internet has greater reach and is comparatively cheaper. The majority of the FOs with a presence on the Internet are based in the developed countries, mostly in the US. In fact, in all of the North and the South, there are only a handful of small-scale FOs who have put up Websites, though more and more FOs in the North have started using the medium.

Though there are many powerful FOs and movements in developing countries, they have only a minimal presence on the Internet. There are some Latin American organizations who are now putting up their Websites. The high cost of computers and modems and the high tariffs are restricting factors that prevent FOs in the developing countries from adopting the technology. If the organizations do not have the technical skills in-house, there is the added costs involved in designing the Web pages, developing and updating their contents, and maintaining the sites.

A compiled list of resources related to fisheries and FOs on the Web is available at the Website of Gadus Associates <http://www.home.istar.ca/~gadus/links.html#index>

There must be many FOs on the Internet who are not 'visible' enough. This is especially likely of FOs whose sites are not in the English language. The popular search engines retrieve Web pages that are in English. At the most, they may retrieve French and Spanish documents too.

With popular search engines like Yahoo, AltaVista, Netscape, Excite, Infoseek and Lycos, even French and Spanish

documents are rarely retrieved. There are some specialized search engines which can get you the documents in languages other than English. Examples are Excite France and Yahoo France. Searches using a search engine which supports keywords in the local language may retrieve national and regional FO Websites. Some Websites provide icons to different language versions on the home page.

The importance given to safety at sea by the community FOs and commercial FOs in the developed countries is something remarkable. In the developing nations, especially in countries like India, the number of fishermen who go 'missing at sea' or die at sea is staggeringly high, though the exact figures are not available. The personnel and vessel safety regulations are, in general, better organized and monitored in the developed nations. In comparison, one can not but help feeling that human life has not much value in the South.

There are very few FO Websites that are actively updated and kept alive. For the majority of the sites, once they are created, nothing is done to update the information or the links they provide.

Better sites

In comparison, the Websites of commercial fishing and seafood industries are much better organized and updated. The Website of the Coastal Communities Network of Nova Scotia in Canada — <http://www.gdlewis.ednet.ns.ca/~coastal/> — is a fishworker community Website which gives information on the local fishworkers, their social status and role in the local economy, changes in the pattern of fish landings, specieswise data on yearly fish landings and quantities, and their value. There is also a small section on the role of women

in the local economy. Two reports on community-based fisheries co-management from 1995 and 1997 are available from the link to publications on the home page. The section, Community Updates, has current updates on various aspects related to local and regional fisheries, job opportunities in fisheries and news releases.

A conference report from June 1998 on coastal and rural communities is available on the Community Updates page. The Website also shares two traditional Nova Scotia recipes, M'ikmaq Eel soup and Solomon Gundy, complete with warnings on the after-effects!

The Website of CONAPACH (Confederación Nacional De Pescadores Artesanales De Chile) — <http://www.conapach.cl/> — is in Spanish. It is an active Website, with links to its accessory bodies/programmes CEDIPAC (Corporación Para La Educación, Desarrollo E Investigación De La Pesca Artesanal De Chile) — <http://www.conapach.cl/asesoras/cedipac.htm> — CFP (Centro De Formación Polifuncional) <http://www.conapach.cl/asesoras/cfp.htm>, Unidad de Apoyo y Servicios Empresariales para la Pesca Artesanal, <http://www.conapach.cl/asesoras/unidadapoyo.htm>. On the site, there are documents on the campaigns against

Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs) and privatization of fisheries in Chile.

A write-up on the National Fishworkers Federation, India (NFF) is available on the URL <http://www.corpwatch.org/feature/india/interviews>. The Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association is a unique organization. Unfortunately, its Website — <http://www.gfwa.org/%7egfwa/index.html> — says it was last updated in February 1999.

The Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA) — <http://www.pond.net/~pcffa> — ("PCFFA is by far the largest and most politically active trade association of commercial fishermen on the west coast of the USA ...") maintains a monthly column in the <http://www.fishermensnews.com>, a widely read, as well as the oldest, publication in West Coast Commercial fishing industry.

The World Forum of Fishworkers and Fish Harvesters (WFF) — <http://www.south-asian-initiative.org/wff/intro.htm> — gives information on its objectives, its structure, a list of members, addresses of some FOs, and links to a few other sites.

Downloadable

In the documents section, the report of the WFF meet in New Delhi (17-21 November 1997) is provided. The English version is available for downloading in

WordPerfect, MS Word zip and HTML zip formats. The Spanish and French versions are available in MS Word zip. The Website looks like it has not been updated since the November 1997 event in Delhi.

The Maritime Fishermen's Union site <http://www3.nbnet.nb.ca/mfuupm/> UPM is in English, but has French and Spanish links. It has a section which explains what MFU has done for the fishworkers. The MFU site discusses local fisheries management, policies, fishing quotas and catches.

Online fish marketing is gaining popularity in the developed countries. Fishmart at <http://www.fishmart.com> provides various commercial fishermen's marketing services in the US in various categories like fresh fish, frozen fish, shellfish as well as the commercially important species. Some FO Websites have provided links to online fishery market news and auction prices. The link Current Market Prices on the Maine Fishermen's Cooperative Association site <http://www.mefishcoop.com/> is an example.

National Fisherman online (<http://www.nationalfisherman.com>) has, besides other information, a link to the US Federal laws related to fisheries. This links up to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to access

important national laws like Magnuson Stevens Act and Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Act.

New Jersey Fishing (<http://www.fishingnj.org>) is a site maintained by the Garden State Seafood Association and FishNet US. It covers the New Jersey fish and seafood industry, harvesting techniques used by the local fishermen, the fish and shellfish they catch, along with recipes. It also discusses various coastal and ocean issues. Under Gear Effects, there is a list of links to resources discussing the effects of trawl and dredge fisheries. This section also features diagrams of some of these gears.

Many Websites give importance to detailed weather forecasts, which are updated twice a day or more. The Weather section of National Fisherman online —<http://www.nationalfisherman.com>— gives prevalent weather conditions in all the major fishing areas off the US and Canadian coasts. The area for which information is needed can be chosen from a map on the page. The information provided includes air pressure, wind speed, direction and wave height, all of which are crucial information for fishermen.

Weather info

The weather information provided by the Maine Fishermen's Co-operative Association — <http://www>

.mefishcoop.com — includes data from weather buoys in the sea as well.

LOST (Loved Ones of Sea Tragedy) —<http://www.irishmarine.com/lost.html> — is an Irish organization set up to help those who have lost family members at sea.

Women's Fisheries Network — <http://web.mit.edu/seagrant/www/wfn.html> — is a national nonprofit network of women and men dedicated to educating members and non-members alike about issues confronting the commercial fishing and seafood industry.

North Pacific Fishing Vessel Owners' Association (NPFVOA) Vessel Safety Program —<http://www.halcyon.com/npfvoa/> — is a non-profit organization dedicated to safety education and training for fishermen and mariners. It was developed in 1985 in co-operation with the US Coast Guard.

FishFolk is a very interesting discussion group on the Internet for anyone with a serious interest in discussing fisheries management. There are sporadic discussions on the social aspects of fisheries and the status of small-scale fishworkers. The list has its own web site (<http://web.mit.edu/seagrant/www/fishfolk.html>) with information on how to subscribe, and biographical information on some list members. There is a searchable archive at <http://safmc.noaa.gov/safmcweb/library/Databases/Fishflksearch.html>, of many of the messages previously posted to FishFolk. To join, send the one-line message "subscribe fishfolk" to listserv@mitvma.mit.edu. Before you join the list, you may want to have a look at the list of frequently asked questions and their answers at <http://web.mit.edu/seagrant/advisory/fishfolkfaq.html>.

FishList is intended to cover similar ground to FishFolk, but with more emphasis on the seafood trade. It is also specifically intended for the commercially oriented messages that are often unwelcome on more academic lists, or at least inappropriate for them. FishList is run by The Fish Highway (<http://www.fishroute.com/>) or "FishRoute"

organization. To join, send the one-line message "subscribe fishroute" to fishlist@fishroute.com.

The Website of CRISLA (<http://assoc.wanadoo.fr/peche.dev/>) is in French. It provides information on industrial fisheries and the damages to artisanal, small-scale sector, fisheries agreements, women in fisheries, damaging effects of aquaculture, ecolabelling in fisheries, and the World Fisheries Day (21 November). The implications of ecolabelling is an issue which has not been adequately discussed by most FOS.

Overall, FOS have to go a long way to make their voices heard on the Internet. The technology is definitely cheaper than other conventional means of reaching out, like the print media. And the Internet provides the reach which no other technology has so far offered. So, it is desirable that we make good use of it.



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