

WSSD

## Where are the fishworkers?

**The Plan of Implementation finalized at the recent World Summit on Social Development was a sore disappointment for artisanal fishers**

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, provided the fundamental principles and a programme of action for sustainable development. The Plan of Implementation finalized at the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD), held from 26 August to 4 September 2002, in Johannesburg, South Africa, was to further build on the achievements since UNCED and to realize many of the remaining goals.

Paragraph 6 of the Plan of Implementation recognizes that eradicating poverty is the greatest global challenge facing the world today, and is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in 1996, more than 30 mn people were directly dependent on fishing for a livelihood. The majority live in the artisanal and small-scale sector of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The total number of people dependent on fisheries today is likely to be over 150 mn.

In the developing world, the lives of artisanal and small-scale fishworkers in coastal fishing communities are, in general, characterized by poverty and a high degree of social and economic vulnerability. The reasons are varied and include:

- insecure access rights to land and sea resources (to which these fishing communities have traditionally enjoyed access);
- great dependence on fisheries for a livelihood;

- uncertain fish harvests as a result of, among other things, natural fluctuations and overfishing due to poor fisheries management; and
- lack of skills and opportunities for alternative employment.

Without appropriate policies for fisheries and coastal area management, the activities of these fishing communities, in some cases, contribute to an even greater pressure on resources. Given this context, and the special focus on poverty, one would have expected the WSSD's Plan of Implementation to focus more on specific issues that concern artisanal and small-scale fishworkers in the developing world.

However, disappointingly enough, 'fishers' are mentioned only once in the Plan, under 'Poverty Eradication', wherein is stated the need for action to "transfer basic sustainable agricultural techniques and knowledge, including natural resource management, to small-and medium-scale farmers, fishers and the rural poor, especially in developing countries, including through multi-stakeholder approaches and public-private partnerships aimed at increasing agriculture production and food security."

### Environmental focus

Paragraphs 29 to 34 of the Plan of Implementation on oceans and coasts highlight several aspects including, among others, the need for better co-ordination between the UN and other agencies working on coastal and marine issues, time-bound implementation of various international legislation, and plans of action for conservation and sustainable management of coastal and marine resources, regulation of fishing

capacity and of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and control of land- and marine-based sources of pollution. These aspects are undoubtedly important and imperative.

**T**here is no mention, however, of the artisanal and small-scale fishworkers, who depend on these resources for their livelihoods and whose lives, as mentioned earlier, continue to be characterized by a high degree of social and economic vulnerability. Environmental aspects need to be looked at in conjunction with social aspects, if the twin goals of poverty eradication and sustainable development have to be met. The Plan fails to recognize that in poor, labour-surplus fishing economies, selective artisanal and small-scale fisheries are the vehicles for poverty eradication and sustainable development.

The only reference to small-scale fishing is in Paragraph 29(g), which states the need to “assist developing countries in co-ordinating policies and programmes at the regional and subregional levels aimed at the conservation and sustainable management of fishery resources, and implement integrated coastal area management plans, including through the promotion of sustainable coastal and small-scale fishing activities and, where appropriate, the development of related infrastructure.” As a consequence, there is no clear strategy to support the subsector.

One basic conceptual issue is the clubbing together of fishers and farmers. Farmers’ issues are dealt with under the section on agriculture; however, the Paragraphs under this section do not specifically mention fishworkers, nor are they suitably phrased to take into account their specific contexts.

Paragraph 38(i), for example, speaks of the need to “...adopt policies and implement laws that guarantee well-defined and enforceable land and water use rights, and promote legal security of tenure, recognizing the existence of different national laws and/or systems of land access and tenure, and provide technical and financial assistance to developing countries as well as countries with economies in transition that are undertaking land tenure reform in order to enhance sustainable livelihoods.”

In the context of fishworkers, what is required is to adopt policies, and develop and implement laws that guarantee artisanal and small-scale fishworkers and their communities well-defined, non-transferable (although inheritable) and enforceable rights to coastal and marine resources, and that promote legal security of tenure, to enhance sustainable livelihoods.

Similarly, Paragraph 6(h) stresses the need for land-tenure arrangements that recognize and protect indigenous and

common-property resource management systems. In the context of artisanal and small-scale fisheries, the need is clearly for tenure arrangements that recognize and protect indigenous and common-property resource management systems over coastal and marine resources.

Fishers and farmers, undoubtedly, have many issues in common; but there are issues specific to fishworkers that are crucially important for the sustainability of fisheries resources and for the lives and livelihoods of artisanal and small-scale fishworkers and their communities. These include, among others, the need to:

- ensure fair and equitable fisheries arrangements that protect both marine fisheries resources and the interests of artisanal and small-scale fishing communities that depend on them;
- explore the possibility of providing preferential access on specified terms, to artisanal/small-scale fishing vessels from neighbouring coastal States, especially in fishing waters where there has been a tradition of migration of artisanal fishermen;
- evolve, on a priority basis, necessary mechanisms for the release and repatriation of

fishermen arrested for trans-border movement into the waters of other States; and

- put in place seafood export policies that regulate free trade of fish and fish products in countries without effective management measures, to protect fisheries resources and fishworkers' livelihoods in the exporting countries.

These concerns ought to have found mention in the WSSD's Plan of Implementation, but they were conspicuous by their absence.

Thus, from the point of view of artisanal and small-scale fishworkers, the Plan is a disappointment. It fails to consolidate and take further the recognition artisanal and small-scale fishworkers have won in earlier international processes, including UNCED, the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Chapter 17 of UNCED's Agenda 21, for example, took into account several concerns of the artisanal and small-scale fisheries sector put forward at Rio. Articles 17.81 and 17.82 are specifically relevant in this context.

These articles stipulate:

17.81. Coastal States should support the sustainability of small-scale artisanal

fisheries. To this end, they should, as appropriate:

- (a) Integrate small-scale artisanal fisheries development in marine and coastal planning, taking into account the interests and, where appropriate, encouraging representation of fishermen, small-scale fishworkers, women, local communities and indigenous people;
- (b) Recognize the rights of small-scale fishworkers and the special situation of indigenous people and local communities, including their rights to utilization and protection of their habitats on a sustainable basis;
- (c) Develop systems for the acquisition and recording of traditional knowledge concerning marine living resources and environment and promote the incorporation of such knowledge into management systems.

17.82. Coastal States should ensure that, in the negotiation and implementation of international agreements on the development or conservation of marine living resources, the interests of local communities and indigenous people are taken into account, in particular their right to subsistence.

The UNCED process also influenced other international instruments and voluntary codes that strongly emphasize the protection and management of coastal resources and the rights of fishworkers to these resources. Relevant in this context are Articles 6.18 and 10.1.3 of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

Article 6.18 of the Code states, "Recognizing the important contributions of artisanal and small-scale fisheries to employment, income and food security, States should appropriately protect the rights of fishers and fishworkers, particularly those engaged in subsistence, small-scale and artisanal fisheries, to a secure and just livelihood, as well as preferential access, where appropriate, to traditional fishing grounds and resources in the waters under their national jurisdiction."

Article 10.1.3 says, "States should develop, as appropriate, institutional and legal frameworks in order to determine the possible uses of coastal resources and to govern access to them taking into account the rights of coastal fishing communities and their customary practices to the extent compatible with sustainable development."

Similarly, Article 10 (c) of the CBD asks parties to, "protect and encourage customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices that are compatible with conservation or sustainable use requirements."

As far as the artisanal and small-scale fishworkers are concerned, therefore, the lack of focus on their sub-sector and on the social aspects of coastal and marine fisheries management in the WSSD Plan of Implementation, is, indeed, unfortunate and even regressive.

Hopefully, however, the recognition of their concerns in Agenda 21 and other processes will get reflected in the programmes and projects to be implemented in the post-WSSD period. ♣

This report has been filed by  
Chandrika Sharma (icsf@vsnl.com),  
Executive Secretary, ICSF