

Documentary

Under the sun

A film recently produced by ICSF documents the plight of the transient fisherfolk of Jambudwip island in West Bengal, India

Jambudwip is a 20-sq km island in the district of South 24-Parganas, in the Indian State of West Bengal, in the Sunderbans delta. Since at least 1955, Jambudwip has been used as a base for fishery operations and as a fish-drying site, mostly by small-scale, artisanal fishworkers. *Behundi jal* or stake-net fishery is the traditional activity practised in different parts of the Sunderbans delta. The largest stake-net fishing operation in the Sunderbans is based in Jambudwip.

However, this traditional source of livelihood and sustenance is now under serious threat. It is being alleged that the seasonal 'occupation' of the Jambudwip island by fishermen and the fish-drying activity is a non-forest activity that cannot be permitted under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, without prior approval of the central government. The West Bengal government has been asked to remove all traces of 'encroachment' on Jambudwip island.

While the Fisheries Department of West Bengal has strongly defended the fishermen's claim to the seasonal use of the island for their fishery, the State's Forest Department is bitterly opposed. The fishermen are now living in the shadow of uncertainty. Will their two-generations old fishery be treated as an activity eligible for regularization or will they be summarily evicted when their fisheries are dismissed as ineligible for regularization?

These issues are dealt with in the documentary film, *Under the Sun*, produced by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and directed by Rita Banerji for Dusty Foot

Productions. The film tackles the issues involved in the stake-net fishery of Jambudwip. It traces the genesis of the standoff between the fishworkers and the government, and analyzes the processes that led to the government action against the traditional fishworkers. It also documents the response of the fishworkers, as well as the actions taken by the National Fishworkers' Forum to help them regain their rights to the fishery.

Copies of the film (format: CD-ROM; duration: 36 minutes; language: English) can be had from ICSF for a suggested contribution of US\$15 each. Please contact icsf@vsnl.com.

This notice comes from the ICSF Secretariat (icsf@vsnl.com)