

An African briefing

A recent ICSF training programme in Accra, Ghana, dealt with issues in fisheries, social analysis and organizational strategies for Africa

The fisheries sector in Africa is an important source of food, employment, income and livelihood. The artisanal sub-sector is vibrant, providing employment and income to coastal fishing communities, and, in turn, contributing significantly to the local economy and to food security. However, developments over the past few decades are increasingly threatening the livelihood of coastal fishing communities as well as the health of the fishery resource base. Some of these issues were discussed at a recent ICSF training programme on 'Fisheries, Social Analysis and Organizational Strategies', held in Accra, Ghana between 17 and 28 August 1988.

Africa has seen a rapid expansion in industrial fisheries, employing highly efficient and non-selective fishing technology, which has caused an exponential growth in fishing effort in the region. This is leading to overexploitation of fishery resources in many areas. The practice by countries in the region of entering into fishery agreements, thereby granting access to the often highly subsidized industrial fleets of the European Union (EU) and other distant-water fishing nations, is exacerbating this situation. With resource scarcity and degradation, conflicts between the artisanal and the industrial sector are increasing. Even as returns from fishing decline, the increased costs of inputs required to remain competitive are eating into the profit margins of small-scale fishers.

Similarly, the access to fish of women fishworkers from coastal communities, traditionally involved in marketing and processing fish, is also being affected by the expansion of the industrial processing sector, as well as by resource scarcity and habitat degradation.

Even though there are several such challenges facing the artisanal sector in many African countries, fishworkers in the sector in most of these countries, with the exception of Senegal, are not politically or economically well organized. Some sporadic efforts at political organization have been sparked off in recent years, as artisanal fishworkers try to defend their interests, as in Ghana, South Africa, Guinea Conakry, Madagascar and Benin. These initiatives are often supported by local and international NGOs. They are often quite localized and need strengthening at the national and regional level.

It is in this context that ICSF responded to a request by TESCO (Technical Services for Community Development), an NGO working with artisanal fishing communities in Ghana, to organize a training programme for people working at the community level. This request was supported by organizations working with fishworkers in Senegal. It was decided to also invite organizations working with fishing communities in other parts of Africa. The purpose was to bring together such organizations to reflect on the common issues facing fishworkers in the region, such as resource degradation and inappropriate policies, and to strengthen networking and co-operation between them.

Programme objectives

The objectives of the programme were to:

- enable participants to develop an understanding of fisheries development and management, especially in the African context;
- develop skills related to organizational work and social analysis; and



- facilitate exchange of experiences and networking between organizations working with artisanal fishing communities in the African region.

Twenty-one participants from nine African countries—Benin, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Madagascar, Mozambique, Senegal and South Africa—participated in the programme. The participants were from diverse backgrounds. Most of them belonged to NGOs working with fishing communities in their countries, such as those from Benin, Cape Verde, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Madagascar and Senegal.

There were two participants representing CNPS, a fishworker organization from Senegal. The three participants from Mozambique represented a government body, the Institute for Development of Small-scale Fisheries (IDPPE), which deals with small-scale fisheries in the areas of production technology and socioeconomic development.

The participant from South Africa belonged to an association, the Informal Fishing Communities, which is fighting, in the post-apartheid era, for recognition of the rights of traditional fishers to fish resources. The resource team for the programme included persons from within and outside Africa, with extensive

experience in working with fishworkers and their organizations.

A questionnaire, to collect information on various aspects of marine fisheries, was sent to participants prior to the programme. Participants were requested to prepare reports, based on this questionnaire, on the fishery sector in their country, and changes within it. These reports were presented by the participants on the first day of the programme, and set the tone and agenda for the rest of the programme.

The 12-day workshop itself dealt with the following themes:

- Fisheries development in the West African context
- Global fisheries development in the context of the development debate
- Framework for social analysis
- Organizational strategies skills and strategies
- International agreements of relevance to fisheries
- Fisheries agreements
- Fishery management options

For most of these sessions, resource material was put together by the ICSF Secretariat and the resource persons, and made available to participants in both English and French. The sessions were organized in a participatory manner, and the experiences of the participants were brought in at every stage. There were several sessions of group work to stimulate discussion and reflection and to draw in the knowledge and experience of the participants. After every two-day session, the resource team met with a small group of participants selected by the large group, to obtain feedback and to incorporate their suggestions into the programme content and structure. Sessions were conducted either in French or English, with simultaneous translations.

The workshop provided an excellent opportunity for participants to identify the problems facing their fisheries and their communities. It provided an opportunity to reflect on the kind of development and fishery they would like to work towards.

They stressed that development should lead to economic growth with equity (including gender equity), an improvement in living conditions, and the sustainable use of environmental resources. They were clear that all that is modern and technologically advanced has not lead to 'development'. In the fishery sector this has been more than evident, given the overfishing and destruction that has been made possible by 'modern technology'. As a consequence, fish resources and fishing communities are both in crisis in most parts of the world.

The workshop also helped participants to develop a greater appreciation of traditional science and traditional systems of fishery management. It was recognized that traditional knowledge systems and technologies have developed over generations of interaction with the coastal ecosystem, but are often considered backward and inefficient. However, this may not be the case. In Senegal, for instance, fishers continue to prefer the traditional craft, the pirogue. Participants felt that traditional knowledge systems and local, community-based systems of

fishery management have a great relevance today.

Participants were also emphatic about the need to question modern technologies and value systems, where production is for profit, not for need. The logic in the present system is to create more and more needs and wants, and to increase profits. People are consuming more than they need to live and survive, and, in the process, are destroying the resource base and jeopardizing their own future. They felt the need for a new value system based on caring and sharing, where the well-being of people is the focus, not on the wealth generated.

A sustainable development of the fisheries, said the participants, would require: strong organizations of fishworkers at all levels; local control and management of resources; regular consultations with all persons with a stake in the fishery; use of appropriate and locally specific technology; use of selective gear and practices by the artisanal fleet, i.e. exercising rights with responsibility; ban on industrial fisheries using destructive technology; promotion of sustainable forms of aquaculture only for local consumption, not for export; elimination of wastes at all levels, for example, by utilizing by-catch; promoting safety of fishers at sea by making use of available technology; micro-enterprises for fish-processing managed by community groups; and a regional approach to fishery management, since fish is a mobile resource.

The participants highlighted the need to work towards a sustainable fishery, where nature, men and women matter, and where fish is for life and livelihood. To work toward this ideal, participants identified three main areas they have to focus on: information and training, influencing government policy, and strengthening fishworker organizations.

Future plans

On their plans for the future, participants were clear that they would work systematically towards a sustainable fishery, as discussed during the workshop, at the local, national and regional levels. The participants from West Africa agreed that they will work

The Accra Workshop

This is the Statement of the Participants of the Workshop of Fisheries, Social Analysis and Organizational Strategies in Africa, presented in Accra, Ghana on 28 August 1998.

We, the supporters of artisanal fishworkers from nine countries in Africa namely, Benin, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Senegal, Madagascar, Mozambique and South Africa, are concerned about the growing crisis in the fisheries sector and the impact of this on food security. Millions of women and men whose dependence on the fisheries is economic, as well as cultural and social, are experiencing a growing threat to their life and livelihood.

Our concerns:

Large, foreign industrial fishing and processing companies are manipulating the political system and are, therefore, influencing the future of small-scale fishworkers at the global level. They are undermining the sovereignty of the State and reducing it to an executive institution.

The growing overcapacity of the world's fishing fleets, and the increasing deployment of these fleets from other continents to African waters, is further adding to the existing overcapacity.

Despite their sovereignty, their rich natural resources, and their numbers, the 70 ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries have no power in the negotiations, both on the Fishery Access Agreements and on the Lome Convention. This situation arises from a complexity of historical factors which have provoked dependence and led to a disintegration of their economies.

The new-generation fishery access agreements between the EU and ACP countries favour the creation and the development of joint ventures, thereby marginalizing the professional organizations in the small-scale fisheries sector in the process of negotiations.

There is an unwillingness on the part of governments and other international institutions to inform and communicate with the public, and in particular, with coastal fishing communities. The consequent alienation of fishworkers from their resources results in their disinterest towards fisheries management policies that do

not keep their long-term interests in mind. It leads to the increasing use of intensive and destructive fishing practices by the artisanal sector, which threaten fish stocks and consequently the future of their fisheries.

There is a lack of transparency in (and often contradiction between) development policies and practices. There is an absence of collaboration and/or co-ordination between the different actors who are involved in the development of the fishery sector.

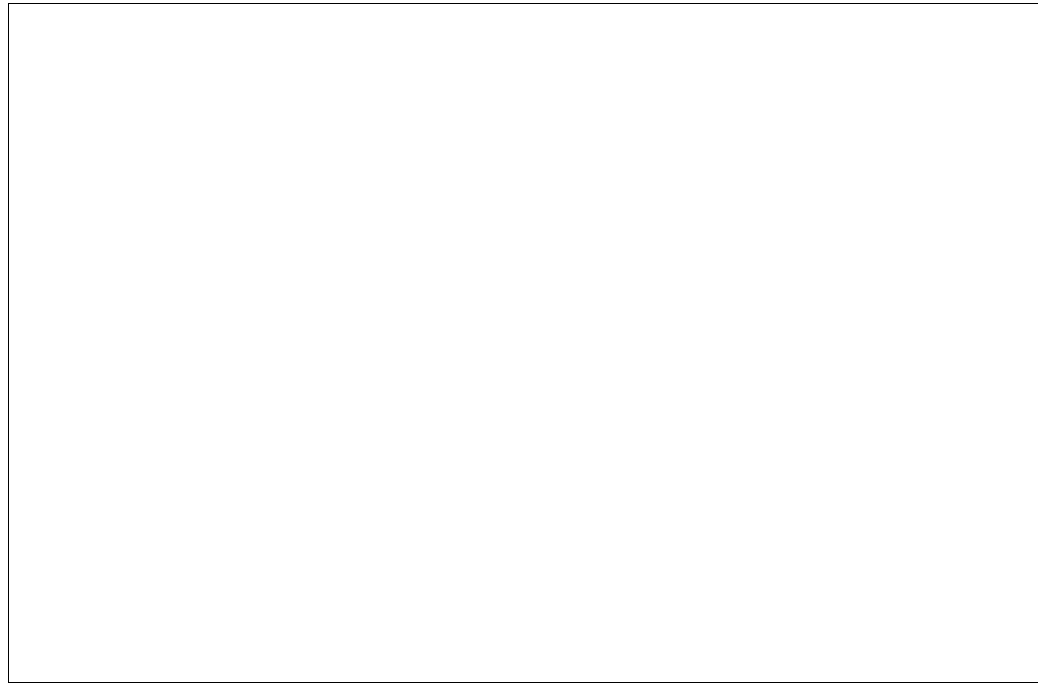
The lack of information about, and recognition by society of, the role of women in the artisanal and traditional fishery sector leads to their marginalization in the fishery and in decision-making processes.

There is increasing pollution and degradation of coastal zones by human activities at sea and on land. With the coastal zone being targeted for modern development activity, including tourism, coastal communities are being marginalized and are losing their rights of access to the coastal zone.

With the increasing demand for shrimp and other high-value species in the work market, we fear that the West African seaboard will soon be targeted for intensive aquaculture, thereby causing irreparable damage to the coastal ecosystem and to coastal communities, as has happened in several part of the world.

The working conditions of seafarers on board foreign industrial fishing vessels are inhuman and violate international standards of safety and conditions of work. We recognize that, in general, the fishworkers in Africa are not well organized and are, therefore, unable to combat the impact of adverse global and national government policies. This also hinders debate on issues that need to be dealt with at the regional level.

We are also conscious of the fact that their counterparts in Northern countries also face similar problems and that this calls for better partnership among small-scale fishworkers around the world. Given these concerns, we pledge that we will do our utmost to work towards a fishery that will sustain the life and livelihood of coastal communities, and that of coming generations.



together on the following areas: strengthening fishworker organizations and their participation in resource management at the local and national level; strengthening networks at the regional level; strengthening regional marketing networks and the exchange of indigenous processing technologies.

Participants agreed to work towards a concrete plan of action for these goals. They proposed a small committee consisting of representatives from TESCOOD (Ghana), ADIPEG (Guinea Conakry), CNPS and CREDETIP (Senegal) to lead and facilitate the process. The participants from the southern part of Africa were also keen to develop a network of southern African states, which could include Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa, Angola and Namibia.

For the participants, the workshop was an opportunity to gain information, develop analytical skills to help in their work with fishing communities, and to develop a strategy to work together in the future. 🐟

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