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SAMUDRA

REPORT

INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS



News from | Bangladesh Canada France India
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Comment

Don't forget fishworkers

A widely reported conference on the conservation and management of highly migratory stocks like tuna, and of straddling stockspecies like cod that lie both within and beyond exclusive economic zoneswas held at New York from 12 to 30 July 1993.

The Conference was of concern to artisanal and small-scale fishworkers for various reasons. The inter-relationship of species implies that excessive harvest of any one species could sometimes affect the catch potential of others, irrespective of juridical boundaries.

The situation is worsened by burgeoning international fisheries agreements to access the under-exploited waters of the South. In Senegal, for example, the artisanal fishworkers' organisation, Collectif National des Pecheurs Artisanaux du Senegal (CNPS), has been lobbying against the fisheries agreements under the Lome Convention of the European Community. Further, overexploitation of stocks can lead to the migration of fishing fleet into inshore waters. This could threaten the lives and livelihood of artisanal and small-scale fishworkers in the North and the South.

However, the plight of victims of distant water fishing nations received scant attention at the Conference. The Conference made no mention of the importance of human rights aboard fishing vessels of countries known to operate with workers from the South, who are often employed on highly exploitative terms and conditions. Without making amends for this, and without recognizing the vulnerability of artisanal and small-scale fishing communities, there cannot be any responsible fishing. Neither can fishing vessels that do not meet the minimum standards of working conditions be expected to comply with resource management regimes.

Discussing fisheries is a very complex matter because fish is, at one and the same time, food, commodity and species. Despite well-documented difficulties, and the near impossibility of obtaining reliable data on straddling and migratory stocks, the Conference is still underpinned on traditional concepts of resource management, which have so far not prevented overfishing anywhere in the world.

Without an integrated perspective which takes into consideration all the above aspects as well as the needs and priorities of various interest groups, there will be little success with fisheries management. Special provisions should be made to protect the interests of artisanal and small-scale fishworkers who face direct and indirect threats, especially since they lack recourse to an alternative livelihood.

When the Conference meets again in March 1994, it should also address the issue of violation of human rights in joint ventures. There should be adequate provisions for implementation of strong punitive measures by the port states themselves, instead of leaving these to ill-equipped flag states. The poor system of monitoring, Control and surveillance that prevails in almost all developing countries should not become an excuse for the continued violation of the fishing space of artisanal fishermen.

But only by expanding its current, rather rigid, framework can the Conference hope to tackle these substantive issues.

A rather damp squib

Although there was general agreement on the dangers of overfishing, no one at the UN Conference could agree on who to blame

It had all the ingredients for a dramatic climax: a New York location, 150 diplomats and assorted delegates, over 50 diverse NGOs committed to a common cause, three weeks of impassioned talk and fervent debate, and even a spectacular sail-by of the renowned environmental vessel *M.V. Green peace*.

In the end, it turned out to be a rather damp squib. There were no fireworks to remember at this UN Conference in July 1993, which was all about managing straddling and highly migratory fish stocks on the high seas.

A follow-up to the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, it was meant to take off from UNCED's Agenda 21. That document had aimed for the sustainable use and conservation of marine living resources of the high seas, under national jurisdiction.

But in New York, this focus was blurred by technical issues of surveillance and data collection, as well as dignified quarrels between coastal and high-seas fishing states over the 'rights' of access to straddling and highly migratory fish stocks.

"The crux of the problem, it seems", commented ECO, the journal brought-out cooperatively by NGOs at the Conference, "is that narrow self-interest continues to dominate. Both sides are pointing at each other saying, 'we're not to blame.' And, under the classical rules of negotiation, both sides recognise that whoever makes the first concessions will end up the loser."

These 'sides' are coastal countries and 'distant water' countries. The former, like Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Argentina want to also control the rights

to fish beyond their 200-mile exclusive economic zones (EEZ). The latter, like Japan, Spain, Russia, Taiwan and, to a lesser degree, the United States, however, wish to maintain status quo.

Coastal countries contend that distant water fishing vessels destroy breeding grounds and deplete fish stocks in territorial waters. To counter, the other side charges coastal nations of mismanaging their own fisheries.

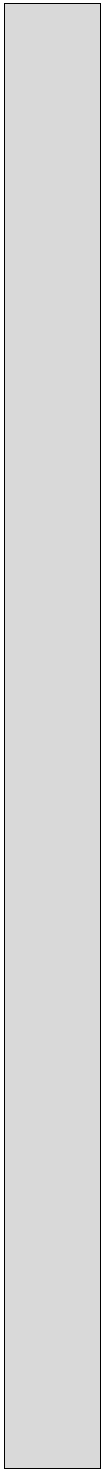
Scores of NGOs from all over the world presented the Conference with their 'Fisheries Statement.' This stressed three key points: the need to conserve fisheries, to protect the environment and to respect and recognise the rights of small-scale, traditional and indigenous fishworkers and fishing communities.

On the principal issue of the Conference, the NGO statement called for a consistent management regime across the range of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks. "Transboundary problems require transboundary solutions for all countries concerned," it said. It also proposed a global fisheries conservation fund, something never previously discussed.

Several ideas

There were many ideas mooted at the Conference. Gary Spiller of Ocean Voice International, Canada for instance, advocated the '25 per cent solution' by which a quarter of the traditional fishing area used by a community is set aside to establish a marine reserve. Such Community Based, Marine Reserves and Resource Management could be important inputs for sustainable fisheries management.

While several proposals were mooted, much of the talk appeared routine. ECO





found that “the first few days of the Conference sounded very similar to the previous two to three years of UNCED, FAO and other discussions preceding this conference: lots of talk and no real results.”

Success came in two areas: identifying and assessing existing problems, and considering how to improve co-operation among States on the question of fisheries management.

However, despite attempts, the Conference failed to formulate appropriate recommendations. Nor did it adopt any legally binding agreement. There were disputes on the question of State sovereignty and absolute jurisdiction on enforcement. In the absence of unqualified consensus, it was not surprising that the only suggestion everyone agreed on was to meet again for two more sessions in 1994.

Said Satya Nandan, chairman of the Conference, “Considerable discussion has focused on the need for precautionary approaches to the management of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks!”

“My sense is that there is an emerging consensus on this issue, and all delegates have expressed support for the concept in principle.”

“However,” he added, “the precise use of the precautionary approach in fisheries management has to be further elaborated,

and there is agreement that the Conference will address this issue at the next session.

Such official optimism did not, however, go down well with NGOs. On their behalf, Milka Naqasima of Women and Fisheries Network of Fiji said, “In addition to differences over substantive reforms, there is little evidence that any common commitment exists to adopt legally binding obligations at the global level.”

The differences were more fundamental. Naqasima continued, “it is not acceptable, in our view, to defer considerations of legal mechanisms on the grounds that ‘form follows substance.’ Substance and form are integrally related, and hopefully the next session of this conference will reflect that reality.”

At the one that just ended, however, delegates apparently did not get a vital message, even though they hurriedly left their seats to read it emblazoned on *M. V. Green peace*, which sailed to the back door of the United Nations: “UN: Don’t Fish for Excuses.” ■

This article draws on reports from The New York Times, ECO, Earth Negotiations Bulletin, UN Radio and ICSF

Poor management, dwindling stocks

The traditional pole-and-line fishermen of Japan have been hit badly by the growth in purse-seining

Forty-five years ago the captain of a ship persuaded the Japanese government to import American technology to build *Ski raw-i Maw*, Japan's first purse-seiner. Since then things have never been quite the same for Japan's fisheries. Not only have stocks of diverse fish species dwindled, but Japan's artisanal pole-and-line fishermen have also been put to immense misery.

Japan's small-scale fishermen also use trolling and small gill nets to catch migratory species like mackerels, skipjack tunas, flying fish and squid as well as non-migratory species like alfonsino, bastard halibut and spiny lobster.

Traditionally, their fishery has been open for anyone to enter but some degree of self-regulation to control resources has existed. For instance, to protect the alfonsino fish during its breeding season, the fishermen themselves declare a four-month closed season.

No such compunctions bother purse-seiners. Usually, four to five of them make up a fleet which casts the net over 500 metres deep, catching a vast diversity of fish. About 80 per cent of tuna landings are by purse-seiners. A purse-seiner can catch over 400 tonnes of fish at one time. In contrast, small-scale vessels catch just 40 to 100 kg. pa day.

Purse-seining, which began in 1949, is a licensed activity allowed only in the three seas of the Northern Pacific, Central Japan and Western Japan.

In the beginning, Japanese purse-seiners operated only in the northern end of the Northern Pacific area to catch yellow-fin and skipjack tunas (1991 catch: 125, 000 tonnes). But once these stocks got depleted, they began moving southwards

for mackerels and pilchards. This trend, which began around 1965, was a direct encroachment into the area and activity of small-scale fishermen. When it reached Chiba Prefecture in 1973, for instance, the competition completely wiped out pole-and-line fishing in a couple of years.

Many of the 2,000 small-scale fishing boats of Chiba were forced to idle as their catches were priced out of the market. This was because purse-seiners dumped large quantities of catch, pushing prices down.

Purse-seining has evidently led to indiscriminate overfishing. Purse-seiners operating in tropical waters are said to catch even juvenile skipjack tunas, each weighing under a kilogram and measuring less than 50 cm. long. (Large yellow-fin tunas are over 1.5 metres long). One indication of the drop in catches of mackerels, for instance, is the increasing amounts of imports from Norway of this once cheap and popular species.

Chasing stocks

A fisherman from Kochi Prefecture, traditionally a rich ground for pole-and-line fishing for skipjack tuna, told Greenpeace Japan, "When I first started working for a pole-and-line boat back in the 1960s, the catch was so good that you only had to operate from March to September in the offshore of Kochi, up to about 1,000 km to Hachijo Island south of Tokyo. One boat's catch of 200 to 300 tonnes was enough to balance costs."

That is now history. "Today," he continued, "I start operating the boat in January, chase the stock as it moves, as far up as to the north of Hokkaido, which is more than 3,000 km. of travel, until December. Some among the 140 pole-and-line fishing boats can only catch 200 tonnes by operating all year.



This report is based on hearings compiled by Greenpeace Japan

The problem is compounded by the methods of fisheries management in Japan. These are diverse and range from fisheries co-operative associations regulating fishing rights, a registry system for boats and licensing for large-scale fisheries to the activities of the Sea Area Fisheries Co-ordination Committee.

Yet, in the absence of scientific estimates of even the major fish stocks in Japanese waters, these procedures mean little. Another obstacle is the compartmentalisation among the various government fisheries agencies.

Official ignorance only aggravates the problem. According to Greenpeace Japan, one Fisheries Agency officer suggested to the small-scale alfoncino fishermen, “Why not let the purse-seiners operate during your closed season?”

The failure to manage the fisheries has already led to open conflicts. In some prefectures, there have been demonstrations of 3,000 to 5,000 fishermen as well as the surrounding of a purse-seiner by 300 small boats protesting against its operation in their closed area.

In a letter of appeal last year to the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 120 small-scale fishermen from Kozushima Island, Tokyo proclaimed, “Most of the coastal fishermen are traditional fishermen, treating each fish with care, refraining from overfishing.”

“We have chosen intentionally inefficient methods,” the letter continued, “thankful for being allowed to take a part of the fish, hoping that enough is left for future generations.”

That appears to be the only way out. The resolution adopted last year at Japan’s Festival for the Fertile Oceans emphatically expressed a similar sentiment. It declared that “the fertile oceans, which contribute to the basis of a nation’s life and culture, have to be protected and nurtured by the nation of the time and passed on to the future with pride.” ■

Temporary steps will no longer do

The destruction of Northern cod resources has jeopardized lives in hundreds of fishing communities in Canada

It is by now fairly well known that overfishing has depleted the Atlantic Ocean’s resources of Northern cod to abysmally low levels. The ongoing crisis in this fishery has indubitably disrupted the jives of fishing communities in Canada. How this has happened is dramatically illustrated by the case of the Fogo Islanders.

Fogo Island is a small island in the Northwest Atlantic, off the coast of Newfoundland, Canada. Its population of 4,500 people comprises nine communities.

Geographically, the island is located on a particularly rich fishing ground. Naturally, therefore, the fishery is the principal source of livelihood for the island’s communities.

Traditionally, Fogo Island fishermen have relied on the inshore groundfish allocation for their source of fresh fish, most of which is Northern cod, as well as other groundfish, crab and pelagics. Their boats range from 16-footer wooden ones to 65-footer steel ones and their gear include traps and gill nets.

Fogo Islanders are known to be passionately attached to their island. In the 1960s, rather than give in to the Provincial Government’s resettlement programme and move out of Fogo Island, they formed their own worker-producer co-operative.

The Fogo Island Fisheries Co-operative, established in 1967, has since been the mainstay of the island’s fishing economy.

When formed, it had a small membership of 125, with total investments of \$625, but now the number of members has swelled to 1,200 and investments have almost touched \$3 million.

According to Bernadette Dwyer, past president of the Co-operative, “We work in a non-unionized environment as we are worker/owners. The co-op’s achievements are many and, indeed, we have a lot to be proud of.” Today it comprises 700 fishermen and 500 plant workers. In normal times, it operates five plants and notches up annual sales of \$ 10-15 million.

But these are certainly not normal times. As Dwyer elaborates, “The present crisis in the Northern cod fishery has thrown our lives into total chaos. This major reduction in our supply of raw material has translated directly into loss of income to our fishermen, employment to our plant workers, revenue to our co-operative and a weaker economy to our island.”

The 1992 moratorium on fishing for Northern cod was meant to be temporary, lasting for two years. During this period, Newfoundland fishermen relinquished their right to fish so as to protect the long-term viability of the resource base and to allow stock to rebuild. To help the fishermen and plant workers temporarily displaced by this loss of livelihood, the Canadian government offered them a compensation package.

Resources more vulnerable now
However, this measure does not seem to have worked. Recent scientific analysis shows that the stock of Northern cod is still dwindling.

Worse, whatever was left had migrated beyond the traditional fishing grounds to warmer, deeper waters on the shelf of the Grand Banks, outside Canada’s 200-mile fishing zone. The implication is disturbing: the remaining resource is now even more vulnerable to rampant and

uncontrolled fishing. Clearly, much of the present predicament stems from foolhardy old ways of harvesting nature's 'bounty'.

Al Chaddock of the Oceans Institute of Canada recounts the words of a rich fisherman: "Dollars grow faster than fish. In this age of high-tech aqua-business, fishing companies have to act more like major diversified corpora-dons than like natural resource-based subsistence industries."

But the consequences are devastating. "This man is now indeed very rich and very powerful," continues Chaddock, "but the fishery he raped is nearly dead and the fisher people he abused are destitute and in the process of becoming urban refugees."

Some of the problems are apparently beyond Canadian control. Says Jon Lien of Fisheries Resource Conservation Council of Canada, "Canadian scientists and managers have indicated that inadequately controlled fishing practices on the Nose and Tail of the Grand Banks, which lie outside Canadian jurisdiction, must become consistent with management within its national jurisdiction if the present crisis facing straddling groundfish stocks is to be resolved."

There are also those who believe Canada should first set its own house in order. Says Bernard Martin of Fishers Organized for Revitalization of Communities and Ecosystems, "Canada cannot self-righteously lecture other nations about the effects of high-seas overfishing. Canadian fisheries management since 1977 has been a monumental failure, characterised by the development of a huge offshore dragger fleet and by give-aways of huge chunks of the resource to large corporations."

The tragedy of Fogo Island is shared by hundreds of other fishing communities dotted all along the northeast coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, once one of the world's richest fishing grounds. Solely dependent on fishing, these fisherfolk have no other skills to let them enter new professions. The collapse of

their traditional fishery means they have to either walk away from all they have ever had, to face an uncertain future in other areas or stay back and try to survive on government hand-outs and social programmes.

The only apparent solution to the problem is a drastic one. This was articulated by Bernadette Dwyer in a statement to the UN Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in July 1993.

Emergency measures

Endorsed by the United Nations Association of Canada, this called for "an emergency measure imposing a temporary suspension of fishing of all threatened species, in the area adjacent to and beyond Canada's 200-mile zone."

It added, "We all recognize that time is of the essence. Uncontrolled fishing and in-effective management regimes on the high seas can not continue. Such irresponsible fishing practices of highly mobile fleets spells the death knell for coastal communities whose heritage and future are dependent on the fishery." ■

This article is based on statements by Bernadette Dwyer, Al Chaddock, Jon Lien and Berndr Martin of Canada

Fishing for food security

As in North America, indigenous peoples the world over depend on fisheries not only for nutrition but also to maintain their cultures

Five years ago, the Exxon Valdez oil spill made dramatic headlines in glossy newsmagazines and on prime time TV. Tears came easy as images of oil-covered sea creatures pricked the world's environmental conscience.

After a few weeks, however, the world got distracted by other headlines. Not so the indigenous peoples in the Gull of Alaska. For them the effect was devastatingly real. When the ship struck two reefs and ran aground in March 1989, about 250,000 barrels (around 10 million gallons) of oil were spilled in Prince William Sound, Alaska.

By end April, the 3000-square mile slick had coated about 300 miles of the area's shoreline. According to Impact Assessment Inc., the oil spill affected more than half of the fishing sites customarily used by coastal villages.

In this, the UN-decreed International Year for the World's Indigenous People, it is worth recalling the Exxon Valdez episode. It reiterates how closely linked fisheries are to the livelihood and living of indigenous peoples.

Many of them get adequate nutrition only from fisheries. Some localities of North America depend crucially on shellfish, especially in the winter season when other fishing becomes impossible. In some other regions, food comes in the form of shrimp, lobster, mullet, anchovy, tuna and turtle.

Typically, in the Northwest Coast of the Pacific Rim, over half the indigenous peoples fish to supplement food and in-come from other sources.

In the Hudson Bay-Great Lakes area, nearly all rely on fishing for food during the summer months.

Clearly, therefore, being deprived of fishing opportunities would imperil indigenous peoples in either or, often, both of the following ways: widespread malnutrition or an exodus from traditional territories and cultures.

Indigenous communities dependent on marine resources abound. Their contribution to fisheries is substantial. According to FAO, small-scale artisanal fisheries account for a fourth of the total world fisheries production.

Indigenous peoples are not confined to developing countries. They make up about a third of Canada's total inland fishery and half the anadromous fisheries of the northwestern United States (US). North America has 260, 000, like the Inuit, Cree and Mikmaq.

Around 200,000 indigenous people are also found along the western Caribbean Basin from the Yucatan in Mexico through Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama and the Guajira peninsula in Colombia.

Other coastal regions too are home to indigenous people: southern Chile, southern Argentina and parts of Brazil; western Pacific including Australia (especially Queensland and the Northern Territories), New Zealand, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Base for culture

For all of them, marine resources matter in two important ways. They determine how large indigenous societies are and how they are distributed. They also provide a significant material base for cultural development.

This latter attribute is often ignored. According to Four Directions Council, an

association of indigenous peoples from Canada and the US, “among non-industrial economic systems, fishing compares favourably with agriculture as a base for the development of complex civilizations.”

Take, for instance, the fisheries along the Pacific coast from the Columbia River to the Gulf of Alaska. Their productivity sustained a regional style of monumental sculpture and formal theatre called ‘Northwest Coast’.

The size and prosperity of fishing societies are inextricably linked to the location and environmental stability of marine resources. On the Pacific coast of North America, for instance, an entire culture depended on one single stock of salmon species returning yearly to one single river.

Since dependence on such resources is so crucial, indigenous peoples have traditionally had to be disciplined in harvesting and developing their fisheries. The methods vary. Sometimes fishing sites are individually assigned. At other times, restrictions are placed oft when, where and what type of species may be caught.

Through kinship and trade relationships, indigenous communities have also developed their own kind of ‘social

security system’. Fishermen could fish with their kinsmen in distant villages. They could also trade their seasonal surpluses of fish. This ensured that no one would overfish to insure against possible future shortfalls.

Most of the fishing is done near the shore, in rivers, estuaries and inter-tidal areas. These, however, are the very areas which are sitting ducks for pollution and coastal development projects.

Further, many of the species normally harvested are migratory. They are especially vulnerable to the ill effects of industrial activity. Beluga whales caught by Inuit off Baffin Island are found to carry toxic loads from industrial mining activity along the St. Lawrence river, over 1,500 km, to the south of the island.

The greatest threat to North American indigenous fisheries comes from the pulp and paper industry. It dumps large amounts of toxic chemicals like acids and bleaching agents into lakes, streams and bays. Logging blocks the migration of spawning trout and salmon.

The other danger results from hydroelectric dams. Each year the Columbia River, among the world’s largest freshwater systems, used to produce millions of pounds of salmon.

But when a complex of dams was built in the 1930s, fish production fell by four-fifths, destroying the livelihood of many upstream indigenous communities.

Recreational fishing

Such societies are also hit by unrestrained fishing by non-indigenous people as well as recreational fishing for sport. American, Canadian and European Community vessels fish intensively for cod, herring and capelin in Atlantic Canada.

The Pacific coast has seen the overfishing of salmon and halibut by commercial fishing vessels. Further, salmon is increasingly intercepted by the high-seas drift nets of Japanese and Taiwanese fleets.

Despite these problems, few countries put indigenous fisherfolk on par with

commercial and recreational users of the seas. This is because they think artisanal fisheries have no real economic value, compared to commercial fisheries which generate cash incomes and pay taxes. Nonetheless, historically, there have been treaties on fishing rights between colonial powers and indigenous peoples.

Over the past 40 years, growing competition for fishing resources has given these treaties greater importance. Yet they have been neither uniformly nor successfully enforced.

US courts have held that treaty fights can only be modified by Congress. On the other hand, the Supreme Court of Canada has declared fishing an 'aboriginal' right which enjoys constitutional protection, whether a treaty exists or not.

In New Zealand, the new Waitangi Tribunal has ruled that Maoris retain 'full and exclusive' fishing rights in the nation's exclusive economic zone. There are also multilateral conservation treaties which protect the harvesting rights of indigenous peoples. Examples are the 1911 international convention for the protection of Pacific fur seals and the 1985 Salmon Interception Treaty between the US and Canada.

Also, the International Whaling Commission has accepted the quotas suggested by Inupiaq whaling villages.

The 1989 ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries contains important provisions. "Taken together," says Four Directions Council, "these recognise a right to continuity of enjoyment of subsistence resources, including fisheries a right to food security."

The fisheries of indigenous peoples are often characterised by 'self-regulation' or co-management'.

Such sharing of responsibility is represented by, for example, the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission and Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission.

Inuit have formed the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission and the Alaska Eskimo Walrus Commission. Cree have the Cree Regional Authority.

Indigenous communities, however, have little knowledge of quantitative or experimental biology. They, therefore, need technical and financial support from their governments.

The Four Directions Council believes the UN could help. It could provide indigenous people support in several ways for fisheries management, environmental monitoring and marine sciences. In the allocation of high-seas fish stocks, the UN Convention on the Law of

the Sea (UNCLOS) recognises only the principle of non-discrimination.

Four Directions Council argues that, as competition for fish intensifies, food security should also be given absolute priority in allocation decisions.

Leaving things as they are where the high seas is treated as a global common is fraught with peril.

The Four Directions Council offered a startlingly simple analogy in a presentation to the recent UN International Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks.

It looked back to the history of the North American prairies and the long, fierce struggle between ranchers and farmers: “Ranchers did not like fences they liked being able to take their cattle anywhere there was grass. Until the invention of barbed wire and tough enforcement of land laws, the open-range cattle industry helped itself to whatever it pleased.”

The results are alarmingly indicative. “As a result, small-scale farmers were hurt, the grasslands were badly overgrazed, cattle companies over-capitalised, and there was a great ecological and financial crash in the 1880s. High-seas fleets are the cowboys of today,” concludes Four Directions Council.

It is evident that indigenous peoples the world over have much in common. What the indigenous peoples of North America know and practise could not only help other such communities elsewhere but also provide solidarity.

They could also, in turn, learn much themselves. Only a sustained global networking among indigenous fisher folk, researchers and their supporters will ultimately create a body of useful experience and knowledge. ■

This article is based largely on a background study prepared for UNCED by Four Directions Council, North America

Not just home-makers

Fishing is an important, though sometimes neglected activity for women in Fiji

For the women of Fiji, as with their sisters in much of the rest of the world, looking after homes and children is just one among several responsibilities. Their working lives have traditionally been given over to handicrafts, community development and, most importantly, fishing.

Fiji has a coastline of over 5,000 km. and the total fish production in 1991 was 33,000 tonnes. The fisheries comprise mainly three sub-sectors: subsistence, artisanal and industrial.

Fiji is still a net importer of fish products. In 1991, for example, while it exported fish products amounting to 8,320 tonnes, the gross imports amounted to about 13,050 tonnes, comprising mainly mackerel and pilchard for domestic consumption and albacore for processing at the Pacific Fishing Company (PAFCO).

While the fishery is mainly classified into artisanal, subsistence and industrial, the fisher folk themselves are classified into artisanal, semi-commercial, commercial and industrial.

The women of Ra District of the Western Division of Fiji are typical of this nation of islands. Here fishing is the second most important source of income, after sugar-cane processing. Ra District has its own sugar mill which supplies the sugar for the nation.

The fishing villages are close to one another. Yet neither the fish resources nor fishing seasons and gear are similar, even for villages separated by a mere two kilometres.

The Fiji government's Department of Fisheries issues licences to fish and permits to sell. These are meant to regulate

only the commercial fishery. No permits or licences are needed to fish for domestic consumption.

Fiji's Department of Fisheries is believed to be the best managed in the whole of the South Pacific. According to the Director, it is the third largest earner of revenue for the Government, after the Customs and Inland Revenue departments.

The Department follows the principle of self-reliance and is against dependence on external aid agencies. It also discourages subsidies, as far as possible. Instead, it encourages individual enterprises.

For commercial fishing, licences are given only to those women who own an outboard motor and adequate fishing gear. Most women in Ra District have permits. Only a few have fishing licences.

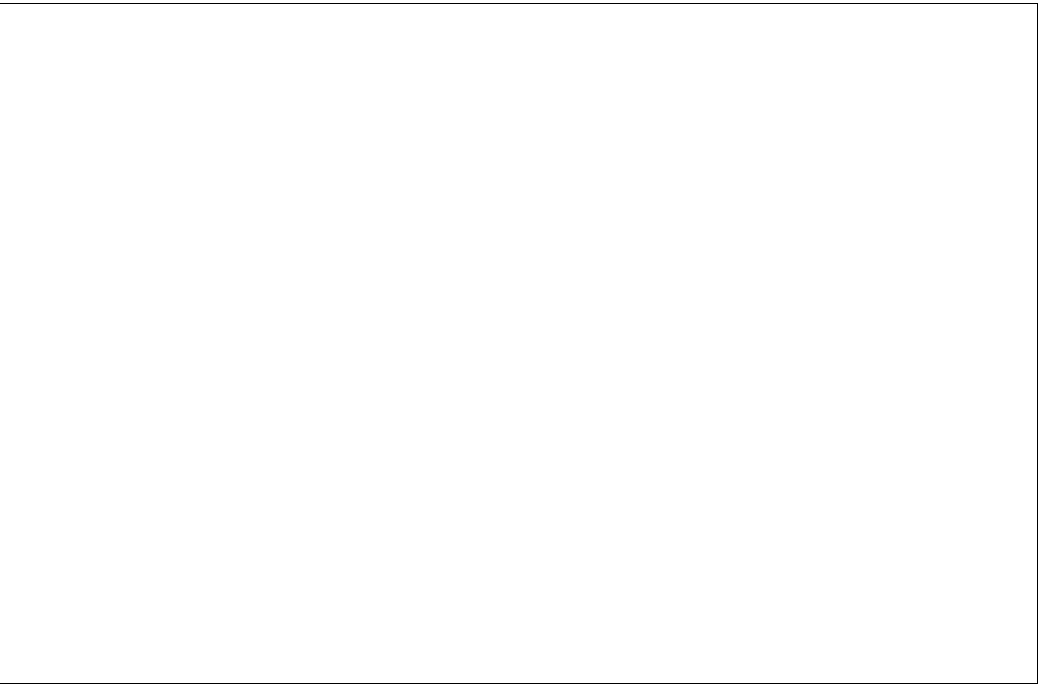
In the north of Veti Levu, at a place called Rakiralci, a large number of women participate actively in fisheries, especially in diving for trochus. Soqosoqo Vakarama, a women's association under the Ministry of Women and Culture, has field programmes with these fisherwomen.

Two kinds of boats

Women fish almost on all days, and operate both inboards and outboard motors in Rakiraki. Two kinds of boats are used: the 28-footer and the 16-footer.

The former can carry about 10- 12 women and the latter six to eight. With a 24-horsepower outboard motor, the boat takes close to an hour to reach the fishing ground, which is often on the seaward side of the reef.

These women are relatives of either the reef owners or the chief. Diving is



normally done from 9.30 pm to 3 am. One night's diving fetches about F\$ 300. While diving takes place on alternate days, fishing occurs on all days except the Sabbath. Women's participation in activities related to fisheries also extend to making nylon nets, traps, and smoking fish.

In a week, the women give the village organisation the value of two days' catch. They retain one day's catch value for education and development of the village through activities like sanitation, construction of jetties and community halls. These women belong to the 19-50 years age group. Most of the divers are older women.

Although women and men fish together at times, most often they fish separately. On Saturdays, fishing is undertaken only for the family. The divers' occupational hazards include deafness and joint pains.

According to Sereana Saukalou, the Coordinator of the Women's Association in Rakiraki, fishing is lighter work than collecting firewood and tending the garden. It is much more arduous to carry a basket of root crops, she says, than to dive for fish and collect them in the boat. In cleaning fish, other family members do help, unlike in cleaning and cooking root crops. The Ra fisherwomen preserve the fish by one of several methods: smoking, drying in the sun, boiling in deep-sea

water or, for overnight preservation, by frying. Deep freezes come in handy where electricity is available.

The fisherwomen sell their catches in towns and villages. From here middlemen buy the fish to sell in other towns and cities. There are also export dealers who buy fish, seashells, pearls and lobsters for the overseas markets of the United States, Australia, Korea, Japan and China.

The fisherwomen of Ra observe traditional territorial rights. They take particular care not to disturb one another's fishing areas and seasons.

Customary beliefs help maintain this mutual restraint. They consider the sea capable of dispensing penalties on encroachers. These may take the form of ray stings or fish poison or even a total lack of catch for the offender.

Fiji's Ministry for Women has a programme on Social and Economic Development for Women. This is usually organised around workshops and training agendas.

On the social front, they cover issues of environment, school lunch programmes, hygiene and personal goal setting. On the economic side, they deal with elementary matters of business and finance like budgeting, costing and pricing, and bookkeeping.

However, according to Saukalou, even though women do participate, fishing is generally perceived to be an activity meant for men.

When they get married to men outside their locality, women who fish refuse to do so if the prevailing customs in that village are against their participation.

A woman can fish only if her husband has rights and that too only if he is alive. She has no right to fish if her husband is dead and if she does not have sons. In general, Saukalou observes, women have a secondary status in Fijian society.

The Ministry for Women chooses to emphasise the importance of the women’s own knowledge and ways of living. At the same time, it seeks to raise their economic standard of living.

Amidst fears that the production from marine fisheries will taper off, the Department of Fisheries is gearing up to focus on management and awareness-building programmes for the public.

In the pipeline is a programme to set up within the Department a Fisheries Management Board, with autonomy for all the separate sections.

About the status of Fiji’s women, Saulcalou says, “I feel fishing is one area which they understand and adapt to well. Above all, it is a traditional obligation of their community.”

This feeling is echoed by Milika Naqasima, convener, board of trustees of the Women and Fisheries Network, headquartered in Fiji. “As regular food providers within semi-subsistence communities,” she elaborates, “women are well placed to perform a central role as fisheries resource managers.”

“But,” cautions Milka Naqasima, “the continued neglect of women’s fisheries activities and of subsistence fisheries in general could have critical implications for the future food security, the health and the very survival of Pacific island communities.” ■

This article is based on accounts by Serana Saukalou and Millka Naqasima of Fiji and the South Pacific Mission of ICSF

Inland fishermen

Traditional access denied

Rich moneylenders in Bangladesh exploit official policy to deny artisanal fishermen access to traditional waters

Beaten by a combination of misdirected government policy and the wealth power of moneylenders, traditional fisherfolk of the riverside villages of Bangladesh are struggling for a just and satisfactory livelihood.

The government's present water body management policy was introduced in 1986. It is meant to provide access to waterbodies (locally called *jalmohals*, *haors* and *beds*) only through leases to fishermen's co-operatives.

But, according to the poor fishermen themselves, the whole programme has been hijacked by rich moneylenders (*inahajans*). In connivance with the police and local officials, these powerful interests have become the *de facto* leaseholders of these waterbodies.

According to a survey by a local newspaper, The Daily Star, Bangladesh has about 10,000 waterbodies of various sizes, totalling around 2.53 million hectares of the country's perennial waters.

Fisheries play an important role in the economy of Bangladesh, contributing nearly four per cent of the country's GDP. It accounts for about 10 per cent of export earnings. Nearly two million people (or about seven per cent of total employment) work full time in fisheries-related activities.

According to Brian O'Riordan of the Intermediate Technology Development Group, an estimated 1.3 million people are engaged in fishing and fish culture, and a further ten million people work during the seasonal floodplain fishery. It was during the martial law regime of Ayub Khan that the *jalmohals* first came

under state control. Until then, they were under local landlords who would tax fishermen for using the waters.

Although the fishermen organised to fight for their rights during the late 1960s, only after Bangladesh's independence did the government abolish the old auction system. In its place it introduced regulation of access through co-operatives. But these were no match for the power of moneylenders.

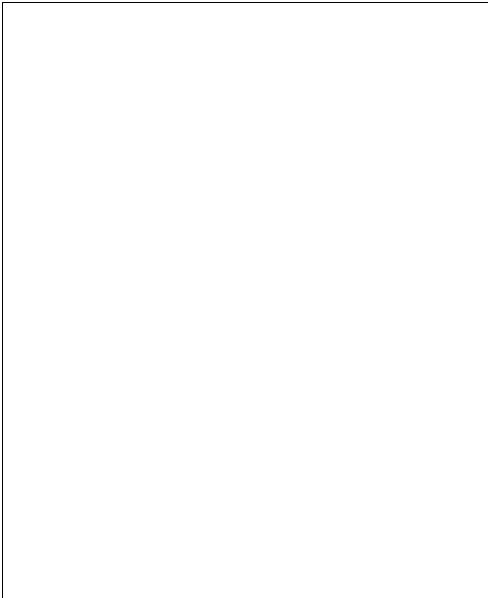
There is a strong and inevitable link between the fishermen and the moneylenders. Since bidding amounts for leasehold rights are high, the fishermen's co-operatives are forced to approach moneylenders. These are influential people who, often enough, engineer splits and factions within the co-operatives to gain control over them.

Since 1986, when the new policy came into effect most waterbodies are controlled and regulated by the government's Ministry of Land. The policy aims to replace leasing with open auctioning and ultimately, a licensing system.

Difficulties in reforming

Yet, as experience has showed, reforming the system is riddled with difficulties. Identifying genuine fishermen is not easy. Nor is the regulation of catch by inexperienced officials. Also, the fishermen are greatly hampered by the lack of marketing infrastructure. Further, the laws of cooperative enterprise, including the means of appeal, are heavily loaded against the fishermen.

With most co-operatives functionally weak and disorganised, the real fishermen find that they are now effectively barred from their own fishing grounds. A typical case is that of the BenglaCharabahda



jalinohal. At one time, this fishery used to provide a means of livelihood to the folk of 15 villages. In April 1991 the government leased out this 2,400-acre closed waterbody for three years in return for 805,600 Taka in annual revenue.

But the leasing policy permits only the 120 members of a particular co-operative society to fish there. Similarly, the Chotra-Uttara river which flows into this water-body, has been segmented and leased out to other societies.

The smaller co-operatives found themselves unable to compete in bidding since the royalty amount was suddenly raised fourfold over the previous term's level.

But even when they formed a consortium to win the bid, one moneylender encouraged a rift in their ranks, say the local fishermen. The moneylender's group wanted to maximise profits by fishing twice during the lease period. According to The Daily Star, in the skirmishes that followed, one villager was shot dead and several others injured.

Intimidation and coercion by the moneylenders' musclemen are now common, complain the fishermen. One fisherman said, "We can fight the robbers and the looters who try to take away expensive nets and other fishing gear, but we are helpless against the 'legal robbery' by the *mahajan*'s men supported by police." ■

This article borrows extensively from a series of reports in The Daily Star by Masud Hasan Khan

Baltic, Bering and Okhotsk Seas

More hard currency, fewer fish

Even as the Russian seas get increasingly depleted of fish stocks, official indifference continues

More and more Russians are wondering why their stores do not stock enough of pollock, cod and the other fish they so relish. The reason is plain. Overfishing in Russian seas has depleted stocks and most of what is caught goes to markets overseas.

But the all-important Committee for Fisheries of the Russian Federation (RUSCOMFISH) continues to remain blind to this plunder.

Environmental critics like Greenpeace say this official organisation cares little for the danger to local marine resources because it is fuelled by the rush for hard currency.

Greenpeace estimates that only a third of the 4.5 million tonnes of fish caught in 1992 reached Russian markets. Joint yen-tines and direct agreements with foreign companies ensure that the rest goes out of Russia. In 1991-92, for instance, over 600,000 tonnes of Far Eastern fish, worth over US \$ 1.5 million, were shipped overseas.

The former USSR built a huge, large-scale fishing fleet of 1,200 vessels. Its total tonnage of 8.6 million was six to 12 times larger than that of the Japanese and American fleets.

According to Ernst Chernyi of the Union of Independent Fishery Workers Russian Federation, "all the Russian boats were concentrated in the hands of a few ventures, fled together to form a monopoly."

What is happening in the Sea of Okhotsk illustrates current problems. A small area in the centre of the Sea falls outside the 200-mile Russian exclusive economic zone. This territory is therefore

international waters. Any vessel from any country is free to fish in it.

In 1991, at any given time, 51 foreign vessels could be found there. They caught 700,000 tonnes. In 1992 the number of ships had risen to 90. Their catch too rose 150-200 tonnes daily or one million tonnes annually.

Last year's catch by foreign fishing fleets could well have crossed a million tonnes. This is much higher than the total allowable catch. In fact it equals the entire catch of Russian fishermen in the Sea of Okhotsk.

But, significantly, as Greenpeace stresses, fish know no boundaries. Thus, the pollock caught in the international waters are the same fish which dwell in the Russian part of the Sea of Okhotsk. As fish disappear in their waters, Russian fisherfolk suffer rising unemployment.

Or consider the Baltic sea. Russian Baltic fisheries are mismanaged too. The International Baltic Sea Fisheries Commission (IBSFC) was set up in 1973 to prevent a repeat in the Baltic Sea of the collapse of herring stock in the North Sea.

Industrial fisheries

But the IBSFC has not been able to arrest the decline of salmon and cod stocks. Industrial fisheries catch herring and sprat wastefully for fish-meal and oil. Fish stocks are so low that many fishermen now want to cull seals which poach fish from nets. The general depletion has also adversely affected other marine animals like seals, porpoises and seabirds.

The Baltic Sea, according to Greenpeace, has the dubious distinction of being the most polluted sea in the world. One result of persistent organic pollutant is a disease

called M 74, which kills some type of yolk-sac fry of Baltic salmon. Greenpeace finds it “alarming that the IBSFC has not taken any action or even informed salmon experts about the problem.”

To compound the socio-economic crisis facing Russia’s coastal communities, the shortfall in supply also pushes up prices for fish and fish products. The Committee for Fisheries predicts a four- to fivefold rise in prices in the near future.

This is ironic news coming from an official organisation meant to oversee the country’s fishing industry and ensure delivery of fish to domestic markets. The Committee’s mandate is impressive. It finances scientific research and conservation measures. It grants permits to fish and to build and buy fishing vessels. It allocates quotas and initiates inter-governmental agreements.

But, in effect, as Green-peace says, these functions essentially make up a closed and self-serving system which sets quotas, controls and organises joint ventures, small enterprises and joint-stock companies, as well as scientific investigations involving catches of thousands of tonnes of fish.

It is easy to see why the Committee for Fisheries is so interested in increasing catches. It gets to keep for itself 90 per cent of all hard currency profits from the export of fish and fish products. In 1993 the catch limits Ruscomfish allotted in the Far Eastern and Northern basins of Russian Seas exceeded 180,000 tonnes of pollock, cod and haddock. That must have fetched us \$ 132 million. Again, two years ago, the Committee granted 5,000 tonnes of cod to Inter-Atlantic, a joint venture which it itself had helped set up.

But some critics say that Ruscomfish is, nonetheless, foundering. For the 1993-95 period, the Committee has asked for state subsidies of about us\$3 billion to support ‘falling’ fishing enterprises.

Greenpeace and other concerned environmentalists in Russia want the Committee’s functions to be transferred to an independent body like the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources.

The Ministry itself is at loggerheads with Ruscomfish. This is clear from a June 1993 letter to the Russian Council of Ministers written by E. L. Shirokov, Assistant to the Procurator General of the Russian Federation.

“The fish protection and departmental fishery science organs,” it read, “having turned out to be playing the role of businessmen, assist the sale of fish to the foreign fleet, and frequently they are malicious violators of fishery laws that they themselves established.”

The Ministry’s State Marine Service also filed a criminal suit against Ruscomfish for 7.7 million roubles for overfishing 85,000 tonnes of Pollock in the Severomorsk region.

Says Ernst Chernyi, “Obviously, the status of fisheries in the Russian Federation has not undergone any changes of major significance since the break-up of the Soviet Union.”

“The Committee for Fisheries retains its vice grip on almost every aspect of the industry,” Ernst Chernyi continues. “If we want to preserve our fish stocks so they will be available for future generations, we must bust the fishery monopoly that still exists in Russia.” ■

The Committee for Fisheries gets to keep for itself 90 per cent of all hard currency profits from the export of fish and fish products.

This article draws on analyses by Greenpeace, official Russian government documents and a report in Eco by Ernst Chernyi of the Union of Independent Fishery Workers Russian Federation

Fishing craft

Appropriate technology power

Intermediate technology has helped the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies build new types of craft for artisanal fishermen

If you were to visit the beaches along the southern districts of Quilon, Trivandrum or Kanyakumari in south India, you are almost certain to see fishermen on plywood boats landing their catches. More likely than not, you would have seen a 'stitch-and-glue' plywood boat built by one of the boatyards under the network of the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS).

SIFFS has four boat building centres at Muttom, Anjengo, Quilon and Veil. Together they account for over half of the plywood crafts ever built in this region. SIFFS with considerable assistance from the Intermediate Technology Development Group, UK has been involved with boat building for the last ten years. In fact, the first craft built by the Muttom yard in 1982 is still in operation.

Most of the fishermen who today use plywood boats were using the dugout or plank built canoes or the traditional 4-log *kattumarams*. (A *kattumaram* or catamaran is made up of logs of lightweight wood lashed together with rope. The most commonly used species of timber in south India is *Albizia falcataria*).

Plywood boats in this region are mainly of two types: the decked boats and the canoes or open *vallams*. The decked boats are unsinkable crafts. They are generally preferred by the erstwhile *kattumaram* fishermen for their hook-and-line operations. The open *vallams*, on the other hand, are used by the fishermen who earlier used the dugouts or the plank-built canoes to fish with gill nets or drift nets.

In the 1980s, motorisation and an increasing difficulty in obtaining logs of the right size and quality to manufacture

new dugouts forced the fishermen to look for alternatives. They then took to plywood crafts in a big way. The fishermen found that these were safer, faster, sturdier, easier to beach, had a greater carrying capacity and were more suitable for fishing in deeper waters than their traditional crafts.

The needs of the fishermen have been constantly changing. SIFFS has consequently been modifying the plywood boats or making new models depending on the demands from the fishermen. Not all modifications or new models have been successful.

Some of the fishermen in the backwaters of Quilon wanted a substitute for their traditional plank-built crafts. For them SIFFS built the *thoni*.

The barrier of cost

While fishermen in general agreed that the *thoni* was a good craft, no one actually placed an order for the craft. This was because the *thoni* is a more expensive craft than the one they are currently using.

The increased investment in a *thoni* would not translate itself into increased returns because they would still be working in the same fishery.

When the fishermen of Pozhiyoor wanted a bigger craft that would enable them to carry large quantities of drift nets comfortably, SIFFS responded with the 28-foot long Pozhiyoor model. This has been a big success with the fishermen of this area and since now gets a large number of orders for this model.

Concerned with the increasing signs of overfishing in the inshore waters, SIFFS attempted to promote fishing in deeper waters by building 'offshore crafts' and

the 'PV series' of *ply-vallams*. These have not yet become popular with fishermen.

SIFFS is now promoting the use of ice boxes and awnings these can double as sails and a few fishermen are currently using them for motor sailing and indigenously built diesel engines. These, SIFFS hopes, will eventually lead the fishermen to 'stay fishing', where they fish for a longer duration and do not return the same day.

Changes in design have also been made depending on the availability of suitable raw materials for boat building. The plywood boats themselves were a response to the shortage of large logs of timber for building dugouts.

Today, good quality marine plywood has become scarce in India and is increasingly difficult to procure. A large quantity of marine-grade plywood is manufactured in India using timber imported from Africa and Southeast Asia.

The result is that the prices of plywood have increased by about 20 per cent in the last one year alone.

Last year, the Muttom boatyard (the largest under the SIFFS network) had to close down production of plywood boats for about three months, due to non-availability of marine-grade plywood.

SIFFS is currently experimenting with a different technique of boat building called 'strip plank construction'. This uses cheap, locally available timber which is cut into thin strips of 40mm x 10mm and tooled so that they have a concave and a convex surface along either edge.

These strips will then easily fit into one another and can be glued and nailed together. Strips of smaller width of, say, 20 mm, can be used while building around curves.

A sheathing of fibre glass is then given to the craft to protect the timber from marine borers and deterioration from prolonged direct contact with sea water. This is especially necessary when the crafts are not beached daily but are left anchored in harbours until the next trip.

Strip plank construction results in crafts that are quite strong. Moreover, the building method is itself easy to learn. ■

This article is written by Philip Cherian, Programme Executive of the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies, Trivandrum

Nuclear contamination

Pacific atolls' nuclear toll revisited

Behind the deceptive tranquillity of these islands lies a sad tale of nuclear damage and local public apathy

Grey-haired, bespectacled, hands and feet swollen, Senator Jatun Anjain is nicknamed 'modern-day Moses'. Since 1969, he has been the member of the Senate of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, representing Rongelap Island. A lone crusader for the displaced nuclear victims of Rongelap, he was one of the co-winners of the 1991 Right Livelihood Award. He is also dying of bone cancer.

As in the biblical saying "A prophet is not without honour save in his own country," Senator Anjain is hated in the Marshall Islands by the government and respected by the world at large for his yeoman service towards the victims of nuclear contamination.

On March 1, 1954 a national holiday in the Marshall Islands the first hydrogen bomb testing was carried out by the United States (US) on the Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. People living in Rongelap and Utrik islands were irradiated by the white ash.

"When people saw red light on the western horizon," Anjain recalls, "they feared that another war had broken out. But very soon they saw snowflakes falling. Children played with them and even ate them up."

These 'snowflakes' were the charred debris of coral from the explosion of the hydrogen bomb at Bikini Atoll in March 1954. The authorities had not warned the people about the likelihood of such an occurrence nor, afterwards, about its potential dangers.

After the nuclear test, there was a disturbing incidence of 'mysterious' diseases. The Rongelapese did not realise that their own health was in danger.

Anjain himself got alerted to the problem when his nephew suddenly died of cancer.

Anjain strongly feels that the US used the Marshallese as guinea pigs. The Americans wanted to show the Russians that they could produce a hydrogen bomb as well.

Even today, says Anjain, there is very little information accessible to the public on the dangers of nuclear contamination.

Anjain believes that unless the government hierarchy improves, nothing will effectively change in the Marshall Islands. It will continue to be a testing ground for US missiles and the people will remain guinea pigs. In fact, the Patriot missiles used in the Iraq war by the US were tested in the Kwajalein atoll of the islands.

Until 1985, claims Anjain, the US refused to divulge any information on the negative effects of nuclear contamination of the Rongelapese. "They told us lies all the time," he says.

He realised the magnitude of the damage only after coming into contact with Giff Johnson, a well-known journalist working with **The Marshall Islands Journal** who was then with Greenpeace and the Pacific Concerns Resources Centre.

That was in 1983. According to Anjain, between 1983 and 1985, Johnson and he planned the evacuation of the Rongelap inhabitants.

Moving out

The *Rainbow Warrior* of Greenpeace moved the islanders to a totally barren island on the west of the Kwajalein atoll. Without any assistance from the

government, they planted coconut, breadfruit and papaya on the island.

Thanks to the services of David Wehnan, a lobbyist, Anjain got clinching evidence from the US Departments of Defense and Energy to establish his case. Due to Anjain's tireless efforts, the US decided to compensate the victims.

So far, about 450 people have been compensated by the Nuclear Claims Tribunal, set up by the US under the Compact of Free Association (CPA) in 1987. A Nuclear Claims Trust Fund of US\$ 150 million has been formed.

About 3,500 claimants have submitted claims under five categories (damage to person, damage to/loss of land, death,

damage to/loss of personal property, and other claims). The number of claims amounts to about 6,000.

According to Sebastian Aloit, an American nuclear lawyer and chairman of the Tribunal, about US\$ 270 million will be needed to distribute as compensation.

This would be about four times the GDP of the Marshall Islands. Until March 1993, US\$ 45 million have been distributed. The per capita compensation amounts to about US\$ 100,000.

Poor returns

According to the chairman, this is double the amount a us citizen is entitled to in the event of a nuclear accident. It is highly doubtful, though, whether the Tribunal

Islands in the sun

Located in the Central Pacific, the Marshall Islands consists of a parallel chain of atolls called the Ratak (or sunrise) group and the Ralik (or sunset) group. The islands are isolated from the rest of the world. The nearest major cities are Honolulu and Tokyo, both 2,000 miles away.

The country comprises a total of 28 scattered atolls, representing a land area of only 181 sq. km. The atolls are spread over a vast sea expanse of almost two million sq. km.

While the land area is small, some of these atolls enclose enormous lagoons. The Kwajalein atoll lagoon, with a surface area of 2,330 sq. km., is one of the largest in the world.

The Marshall Islands has a population of 43,380. Of the total population, 66.5 per cent are on the atolls of Majuro and Kwajalein (45 per cent and 21.5 per cent respectively).

Kwajalein is used as an American military base. It is one of the most important missile testing ranges in the world. The base employs Marshallese workers who live on the nearby island of Ebeye, whose population density of 22,980 per sq. km. is recognised as one of the highest in the world. The island is often described as the 'slum of the Pacific'.

The problems of internal migration is acute. Between 1980 and 1988, the populations of Majuro and Kwajalein showed a very high

annual increase of 6.3 per cent and 4.2 per cent respectively. Provisions under the Compact of Free Association (CFA) between the United States and the Marshall Islands stipulates that Marshallese citizens can enter the us freely and work there. This is expected to somewhat ease the growing population pressure arising from out migration.

The coralline atolls of the Islands are endowed with poor-quality soils. This virtually rules out agricultural diversification without high production costs.

As an Asian Development Bank report observes, "The efficient use of the land is hampered by the traditional land tenure system that gives land rights to the highest ranked members and representatives of the lineage.

Although the land tenure system was conceived originally to provide a relatively fair distribution of land among the population and within a particular lineage, population pressure is too high to maintain such a system.'

The country has a rich potential of marine resources, particularly tuna. The fishery potential of tuna is mainly tapped by distant water fishing nations.

There are also deposits of minerals such as phosphate and manganese nodules. However, their extraction has not proven to be economically feasible.

will be able to distribute the remaining claims amounting to US\$ 225 million. This is due to the poor returns from the Trust Fund of US\$ 150 Million invested in the US.

Senator Anjain spurns the contentions of the Nuclear Claim Tribunal. He asserts that the people who actually lost their lives and land are not receiving any compensation.

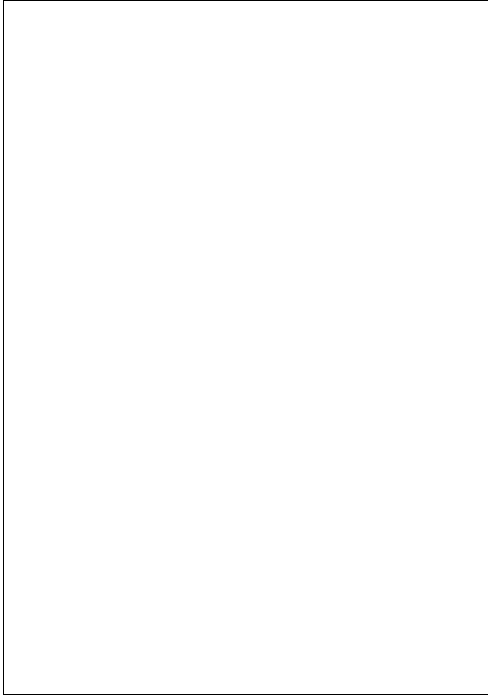
Instead, the money is flowing into the wrong hands those of chiefs and members of the government.

“I am investigating the Nuclear Claims Tribunal now,” says Anjain in a voice enfeebled but propped up by his angry glare. The compensation amounts intended for the victims are given to the chiefs who then distribute them.

This, explains Anjain, gives ample room for embezzlement. People do not protest since they fear losing their settlement rights. These, bylaw, are controlled by the chiefs of the islands.

Ironically, when money started flowing in as compensations, the people just forgot about Anjain’s efforts. Instead, they took him to court. The islanders thought he had paid the lobbyist too much to obtain the crucial information.

Senator Anjain is still not satisfied with the official version of the magnitude of



nuclear contamination. An independent panel of scientists is now examining bone samples for traces of plutonium.

He is also highly frustrated with the public apathy. “My own people do not appreciate what I am doing,” laments this winner of the alternative Nobel Prize.

Darken Keju Johnson, a daring antinuclear activist of the past, now in charge of a youth programme, agrees with many of the observations of Senator Anjain. She has her own to add.

The occurrence of jellyfish baby syndrome, she claims, is high in the Marshall Islands. So too is the incidence of cancer of the reproductive organs.

She is equally critical of the apathy of the people. “They are concerned only about how much each one can benefit from Uncle Sam, there is little national pride, there is no togetherness,” she observes.

She also complains about the lack of public education on the negative aspects of nuclear contamination and is worried about the absence of any systematic study on cancer and its causal factors. Nobody even maintains a cancer registry in the Marshall Islands.

Oppressive system

To make things worse, the authoritarianism of the government, as well as the oppressive system of chiefs, complicates matters further. “What is the point in pounding your chest when people are not behind you?” queries Darleen with great resignation.

Her husband, journalist Giff Johnson the first person who warned the Marshall Islanders about threats from nuclear contamination is today a disappointed man. Sarcastically, he remarks, “The perception of the Marshall Islanders is that they are happy about being the victims of nuclear contamination.”

The state of affairs was not so dismal before big money started flowing in. In 1956, for example, a concerned Marshallese went to the UN to complain about the US nuclear tests. In the late 1960s and 1970s, people in Kwajalein protested against the military base and the ordeal of

Matrilineal power

Marshalllese society is fundamentally matrilineal. Each person's identity in society is defined not just through land rights, but through a matrilineage or bwij and a matriclan or jowi. The matriclan is a grouping of lineages headed by an alap, normally the oldest male representing his community.

Two kinds of bwij exist: the 'upper' class representing the royalty and the nobility, and the 'lower' class of commoners. These rights are held in common by all members of a bwij, never by a single person as a private holding.

The history of the Marshall Islands is characterized by different periods of colonization. It was during these phases that this complex social structure evolved as a response to changes in land value.

In recent times, however, though the traditional system of land tenure still operates, it no longer offers security to individuals in the society. In fact, out-island migration has led to an increasing shortage of land. This is today a

medical testing by US scientists. Slowly, from the 1960s, the compensation money started trickling in.

In recent times, however, though the traditional system of land tenure still operates, it no longer offers security to individuals in the society. In fact, outer-Island migration has led to an increasing shortage of land. This is today a growing wrong.

The trickle became millions in the 1980s. That was when things started going wrong.

According to Johnson, "Once the compensation went up, the issue got internalised, and it became a matter of who gets how much. Money has, therefore, become the bottom line."

Ironically, from the monetary point of view, the Marshalllese had to pay an unimaginably heavy price for signing the Compact of Free Association with the US. Against US\$150 million in trust fund, they had to relinquish all their claims against nuclear contamination. Significantly,

when the CFA came into effect from 1986, US\$5 billion worth of law suits were pending in US courts.

The story of nuclear contamination in the Marshall Islands has a sorry side to it. The lure of compensation has brushed aside larger issues of health and environment in a nation of islands whose ecological processes are extremely vulnerable. ■

This article has been prepared by the South Pacific Mission of ICSF

Fishworkers

Strike!

As oversupply pushes down fish prices, fishermen in France have begun to agitate through direct action

Fishworkers in France will remember 1993 as the Black Year. Their anger exploded in February when, after the bad weather season, the fish-workers sailed again only to find that prices of fish had crashed.

As fish stocks piled up in the auction halls, the mechanism set up by the fishworkers' co-operatives to control prices was soon thrown out of gear. These co-operatives, built around each landing place, had been supporting the fishworkers' activities.

There were co-operatives for credit as well as for purchase of equipment. One specialised in buying and processing fish whenever prices fell below a 'floor price' set by the fishworkers themselves. The system had been very efficient for 40 years but suddenly came to a standstill.

Soon it became clear that the fish market was no longer controlled by the fishing harbours but by the airports where fresh and frozen fish landed in large quantities at prices far below the floor prices fixed by the fishermen. Fish was now a VIP travelling by plane!

In the fishing villages, it was soon desolation all around. Those who had purchased new boats with bank loans were in the red and families got heavily indebted. Solidarity committees of women were set up and became very involved in the whole movement.

As the co-operative system was paralysed, the unions, though divided by many different allegiances, swung into action. A Survival Committee co-ordinated various actions and set up its own cell to draft recommendations. In a first wave of protest, fish workers and their wives started distributing their fish

free of cost to the public. This created a lot of sympathy. They also threw away tonnes of unsaleable fish at various places and in front of government offices, including the Brussels' European Community (EC) office. Various 'attacks' on regional airports took place and fishworkers were seen keenly identifying the countries of origin of the fish boxes: Russia, Poland, the US, Peru and Senegal, among others.

For two months, huge demonstrations took place in various places of France: Bayonne, Quimper, Nantes, Boulogne and Lorient. But, on the whole, it was peaceful, with only marginal violence.

The most impressive action was the ransack, on the night of February 22, of the largest French marketplace called RUNGIS, close to one of the main airports of Paris.

This commando action brought the fishworkers' problem onto the TV screens of the world. The negotiations with the French Government and the EC authorities then started to really take shape. The first responses were of welfare measures money allowances and rescheduling of debt repayments.

Gaining allies

In Brittany, fishworkers also organised meetings and discussions with their British, Irish and Spanish counterparts in order to cross-check their analysis of the situation and to gain allies.

The EC has an old rule which provides for "community preference" in special cases. This could be applied in this situation.

Fish flowing into the markets from the rest of the world was so cheap that the supply upset all the profitability calculations of the European fishing fleets, particularly

those which had acquired new and costly equipment.

The Survival Committee decided to target its demands on fresh fish only, keeping the processing industry out, of the controversy. That proved to be a clever move which gained the fishworkers sympathy in many governmental and industrial circles.

The Committee claimed for 'community preference'. It got this for five cold-water speciescod, haddock, saithe, hake and angler-fish. Taxes would now be imposed at the point of entry into the EC so that the price of imported products would not impede the local fishermen's profitability.

This was only one of the main demands of the Survival Committee. It had also planned that the income from this tax should be paid back to Third World fishworkers' organisations to help them defend their members and ensure fair prices for their products.

Many Brittany fishworkers have travelled to various meetings in Senegal or West Africa. They have realised that artisanal fishworkers there often make distress sales on their beaches merely because they do not have ice or cold storage facilities to preserve the fish and ensure a better price.

Such exchanges have sowed the seeds of solidarity among fishworkers. Unfortunately their government ministers do not seem to be so accommodating.

The last action in the French fishworkers' agitation was a one-day 'dead sea' operation, when no boat went out to sea for 24 hours. There was also a huge demonstration in Luxembourg in front of the EC office, where the 12 fisheries ministers were meeting.

Meanwhile, the struggle is going on. Fishing has not really stopped. Fishermen are taking turns at sea and on land for various actions.

But many fear that to compensate for very low prices, there will soon be greater 'extraction' of resources. Overfishing for many species may well be just round the corner. That would be a tragic outcome of the current problems in France. ■

This article is written by Pierre Gilet, Secretary of ICSF's Brussels Office

The NGO point of view

Several different NGOs from around the world strove to speak in one voice at the UN Conference

“A number of NGOs have been actively following the negotiations leading up to this Conference and recently negotiated a Common NGO fisheries statement for the Conference.

The endorsements have come from a diverse array of organisations from both South and North, including organisations representing fishworkers and fishing communities, environmental and developmental concerns, commercial and recreational fishing interests, women’s organisations, law and policy institutes, and organisations dedicated to the issues of food and hunger.

NGOs strongly urge governments to recognise the growing crisis in world fisheries. This crisis has major implications for the livelihoods of fishworkers and their dependents, the health of the marine environment, and global food security.

FAO has classified virtually all commercially fished stocks as depleted, fully exploited or overexploited. FAO reports that in, aggregate terms, marine fish catches are declining, and that overcapitalisation and massive government subsidies, directed primarily at the large-scale sector, are endemic.

Fishworkers throughout the world face threats to their livelihoods and a future of increasing uncertainty. Many fish-workers in Northern countries are facing job losses as a result of the depletion and closure of fisheries. Fishworkers in Southern countries are increasingly threatened by the expansion and migration of fleets from depleted waters. All fishworkers are threatened by the degradation of the marine environment. Coastal fishworkers and communities are particularly vulnerable.

Deforestation, environmentally destructive and socially inequitable agriculture and aquaculture practices, and the introduction of alien species, desertification, industrial pollution and destructive coastal development generally all these pose serious threats to people dependent upon fisheries in coastal waters.

Fisheries development programmes are largely directed toward short-term considerations, to the long-term detriment of fishworkers and their communities, the marine environment and society as a whole.

Recognising all of the above, the NGO statement emphasises three key points, namely, the need for

- fisheries conservation;
- environmental protection; and
- respect for and recognition of the rights of small-scale, traditional and indigenous fishworkers and fishing communities.

The statement calls for a precautionary approach to fisheries development and management, and ecologically sound fisheries practices.

Regarding the issue of equity, the right of access to fisheries resources must recognise the needs and rights of fishing communities and be based on equitable principles and respect for the environment, and not solely on political power and availability of technology and capital.

Coastal fishworkers are often exclusively dependent on fish for food and livelihood, and any international agreement on

fisheries must respect their fundamental right to survive.

Fisheries management and development cannot be successful in the long term without the meaningful participation of fishworkers, environmental groups and other concerned segments of the society.

Fisheries decisions associated with national and international law, investment, development and aid must be made fully transparent and publicly accountable.

The NGO statement argues that for straddling and highly migratory fish stocks, a consistent management regime must apply throughout the range of the stock. Transboundary problems require transboundary solutions for all countries concerned.

In the long term, national self-interest is ultimately served through effective cooperation in fisheries conservation and management.

Effective institutional mechanisms must be established to ensure global fisheries conservation, a number of which are discussed in the NGO statement. One of the mechanisms that has not been discussed in prior negotiations is the need for a global fisheries conservation fund. We urge you to seriously consider this NGO proposal.

Finally, the NGOs have called for a quick resolution of outstanding law of the sea differences, such that the convention will be widely acceptable to all nations.

NGOs have taken the position that the Conference is an important opportunity for the nations of the world to address the crisis in world fisheries. In order to effectively do so, fundamental reforms, such as those proposed in the NGO statement, are needed. In parallel with the substantive reforms, it is essential that governments commit at the global level standards and mechanisms that are legally binding.

If fish is to continue to be an important source of food and livelihood for humankind, then fisheries must be

conserved, the oceans and coastal areas must be protected and remain healthy, and the production and consumption of fish must be based on socially equitable terms. ■ ”

This statement was presented on July 12, 1993 in New York at the opening session of the UN Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks by Matthew Gianni of Greenpeace International and Sebastian Mathew of ICSF.

News Round-up

Harassed foreign crews

In Taiwan, the Fishermen's Service Center of the Presbyterian Church continues its advocacy for foreign crew, particularly Filipinos, in Taiwanese distant water fleet.

Through media exposures and ecumenical partnerships, the Center highlights the social problems of hiring cheap labour.

Last year, Chinese workers were also smuggled into Taiwanese ships meant to provide them with illegal entry into the United States.

Six boats with hundreds of Chinese nationals were caught. These episodes have further ruined the reputation of Taiwan's fishing industry, says the Center.

The Center also established ties with the Japan-based organization Peace, Health and Development.

In Argentina, a new branch office of the Center began networking with

overseas Taiwanese to intervene in detention cases in that country.

Artisanal fishermen organize

Earlier this year, a few thousand traditional artisanal fishermen of Madagascar got organized under the banner of Federation Chretienne des Pecheurs Artisanaux de Madagascar (FECPAMA).

The Federations secretary-general is Christian Nestor Velo.

A legendary heroine inspires...

During the days of colonial rule in India, the British sought to collect a tax from the local people navigating in the lower parts of the river Ganges in West Bengal. Even the small-scale fishermen were not spared this levy.

There was, however, one person who fearlessly challenged the British—and she was a woman, Rani Rasmoni. Using her leasehold rights, Rasmoni blockaded the river with two huge chains.

This prevented the passage of cargo ships through her lease area and allowed the fishermen to fish freely.

The enraged British were thus forced to negotiate new terms with Rani Rasmoni.

Not surprisingly, her memory is today held

sacred by fishworkers. They regard her as a special friend of fishermen.

...a meet of Indian women fishworkers

Recently, what Rani Rasmoni stood for served to inspire women in the fishworkers movement in India.

On the occasion of Rasmoni's 200th birth anniversary, Calcutta, West Bengals capital, was the venue for a training programme for 17 women participants from the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Orissa and West Bengal.

This was part of the Women in Fisheries programme of ICSF, aimed to create a core group of women activists within the fishworkers movement in India.

Traditionally, only in Kerala do women play any significant role in fishworkers' organisations. This is despite the fact that women participate actively in fisheries-related work.

According to Aleyamma Vijayan and Nalini Nayak of the Women in Fisheries programme of ICSF, the Calcutta training was an

integrated process commencing with our analysis of development, the gender question and social analysis related to the fisheries context. Since the participants came from four different language back-grounds, multiple translations took time. But the use of visuals aided the process. This also gave the organizers a better feel for such training tools.

The programme also discussed organizational processes, while simultaneously giving the participants exercises on developing leadership skills.

It was possible to share and learn from others experiences since some had been working for long in the field while, others were new.

The issues of leadership and power also came in for serious discussion. The participants inquired into alternate models which are more democratic and participatory.

According to Vijayan and Nayak, the most animated discussion took place around the question of women's participation within the fishworkers movement.

Some had very hard and demanding experiences trying to integrate women's issues into the movement.

Others faced personal isolation. Often the women's units were sought to be separated from the larger fishworker movement.

Vijayan and Nayak report that finally, after a serious debate, the group arrived at the conclusion that we

women have to be part of the larger movement, work for structural change within and, for example, ask for a 50 per cent representation for women at the decision-making level, and continue to fight to integrate the women's issues into the larger struggles.

On this note, each group took back an action plan. This, hopefully, will help the women integrate into their working lives some of the ideas and skills they learnt at the training programme.

A new journal launched

Artisanal fisherfolk of **Senegal** now have their own mouthpiece.

The Collectif National des Pecheurs Artisanaux du Senegal (CNPS) has just published the first issue of its information journal, called, La Pirogue Gaal-Gui.

...and a new coalition

Last November, eight NGOs of **Europe** took the initiative to form the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Agreements (CFFA).

It is aimed to petition the European Community (EC) to establish a framework for fisheries agreements between EC fishing companies and less developed countries, especially African/Caribbean/Pacific States. Such a framework is intended to have a wider development perspective.

The Coalitions concerns encompass the sustainable use of fish

resources for the benefit of fishing communities who depend on them for their livelihoods and subsistence, and the conservation of global fish stocks for future generations.

ITF embraces small-scale fishworkers too

The International Transportworker's Federation (ITF)

Fishermen's Section Conference has resolved to expand operations in the fisheries sector.

The concluding session in Benalmadena, **Spain** on 26 March gave a call to organize the unorganized as a response to the current world crisis in fishing.

The conference discussed the question of trade union organization and ITF membership of fishing organizations.

There was general agreement on the need for trade union protection for small-scale fisheries. Delegates agreed to try to bring small-scale fisheries workers into the ITF.

It has launched a recruitment campaign to boost its membership.

No fish, no future

The Canadian Oceans Caucus has launched a No Fish No Future campaign to help re-establish sustainable fisheries and coastal communities, and to

raise awareness of this national crisis.

The Caucus is a coalition of over 50 environmental, fishing and community groups in Atlantic **Canada** and across the country who are involved in marine issues.

As part of the campaign, the Caucus is circulating throughout Canada a petition which will be presented to the country's Prime Minister. It calls for parliamentary action to address the devastating result of overfishing and gross government mismanagement.

Fishing away poverty

Hundreds of fish culture projects are meant to help the poor. Yet few have really improved food supplies or raised incomes for the poor, especially the landless.

To find out why-and how to change the situation- the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) and the Association of Development Agencies in **Bangladesh** organized a workshop for NGOs in Dhaka on 25-26 October last year.

A report of the workshop, just published, proposes actions on both the technical and socio-economic areas. These include better project appraisal

methods and quality seed/feed inputs, as well as financial credit and marketing support by NGOs.

ITDG hopes that the report and the workshop recommendations will help to further the debate on poverty-focused fish culture development in other areas of the world too.

Battling the police

The police station of the village of Flacq in **Mauritius** was recently besieged by hundreds of fishermen and two hundred of them were arrested.

This happened after the fishermen had removed buoys installed by Sun Resorts Limited during dredging operations carried out for the Touessrok Hotel.

Earlier, fishermen had demonstrated against the denial of access to fishing grounds in the lagoon. The entire village fears that ultimately only corporate power will triumph.

Policing truant vessels

ICSF has recently formed a task force to look into living and employment conditions aboard industrial fishing vessels.

The co-ordinator of the task force is Jean Vacher from Mauritius.

To make one nation of many islands, we respect the diversity of our cultures. Our differences enrich us. The seas bring us together, they do not separate us. Our islands sustain us...

Our ancestors, who made their homes on these islands, displaced no other people. We, who remain, wish no other home than this. Having known war, we hope for peace. Having been divided, we wish unity. Having been ruled, we seek freedom.

Micronesia began in the days when men explored seas in rafts and canoes. The Micronesian nation is born in an age when men voyaged among stars; our world itself is an island. We extend to all nations what we seek from each, peace, friendship, co-operation and love in our common humanity. With this Constitution, we, who have been wards of other nations, become the proud guardian of our own islands, now and forever.

— Preamble to the Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia



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