

## A core issue

In the context of the crisis gripping the world's fisheries, everyone seems to agree that only sound and judicious management of resources will salvage most fisheries. Is co-management one of the practicable tools in this mission?

In "Only Partnerships Work" (page 10 of this issue), Patrick McConney from Barbados, a Small Island Developing State in the Caribbean, observes, "Fisheries authorities must recognize that they need to form partnerships with the people in the fishing industry, whether the process is called co-management, community-based management or something else." Yet, in the context of Canada, a developed nation, where co-management processes have been used to manage marine fisheries since 1995, Marc Allain tells us that many leaders of fishermen see co-management as "yet another example of government talking about grass-roots participation and consultation, but doing the opposite" ('The Way Forward', page 14). He further points out the most serious criticism levelled against the co-management approach in Canada, that it is a "smokescreen to advance the government's agenda to privatize fish resources and force everyone on to individual transferable quotas". Based on a document produced by the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters, he elaborates how a co-management approach could actually be adopted to a multi-species, inshore fisheries, to the potential satisfaction of fishers.

This approach of co-management has its origins in the single-species fisheries of developed countries. However, how relevant is it to the multi-species fisheries of developing countries? Co-management essentially means an arrangement between the fishers and the government at different levels to manage fisheries through sharing decision-making powers. Depending on how you use it, it can either lead to a dangerous situation where genuine fishers are excluded from participating in a fishery or to a situation where fishers are given an opportunity to responsibly manage their fishery.

Although fish is an important source of animal protein, foreign exchange and employment, there is hardly any meaningful, planned fisheries management in most developing countries. Fisheries are in crisis not because of poor management but often because of **no** management at all. Many developing countries, although aware of the magnitude of the problem, are unable to do anything because of paucity of funds and conflicting priorities. In this context, a well-designed co-management regime, based on clearly defined rights and responsibilities, could be quite useful, especially to save costs and to legitimately manage the resources.

Since most developing countries lack the institutional framework within which a co-management approach could succeed, attention should first be given to setting up such arrangements. Though these are likely to be expensive in the short run, they should become priority areas for governments and donor agencies. If we are bothered about equity considerations, genuine fishworkers' organizations are essential for the success of the co-management approach. The emphasis on building successful and genuine fishworkers' organizations in the 'development' era in many Third World countries now needs to be re-emphasized in the 'management' era as well.

A bottom-up co-management approach that is cost-effective, participatory and enjoys the confidence of fishworkers might work in developing countries. But it all depends on the kind of institutional capacity that can be built beforehand. More importantly, it depends on building up genuine fishworkers' organizations.