

A quarter century after: The BOBP's relevance today

One of the development landmarks of 2004 is the completion of a quarter century of the BOBP, which began from Chennai in 1979. It can be honestly said that the BOBP quarter century saw a more wide-ranging, sustained, intensive and in-depth study of small-scale fisheries and fisherfolk communities in the Bay of Bengal region than at any other time in history.

BOBP was a pioneer in the region in many areas of small-scale fisheries development and management, and in systematic debate, discussion and documentation on these subjects. The quarter century's work led to scores of lessons, learnings and legacies in all areas of small-scale fisheries. These have been documented through print, video and CD.

The BOBP is now an IGO (inter-governmental organisation). On 7-8 September 2004, the first Governing Council of BOBP met. Delegates from Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka approved of the report for the first IGO year (April 2003-August 2004), also of the workplans for the year to follow (October 2004-December 2005). The Governing Council meeting is reported elsewhere in this issue. Delegates hailed the BOBP quarter century.

What's the significance of this quarter century? Two articles in previous issues of *Bay of Bengal News* (December 2000 and January 2002-March 2003) detailed the Program's work in many disciplines and many countries. To put it in a nutshell: the Programme implemented innovation and action in fishing technology, small-scale aquaculture, post-harvest technology, fishery resources, extension among fisherfolk



communities, women in fisheries, people's participation, bio-socio-economics, pollution control in fishing harbours, safety at sea, environment, fisheries management.

The Program's impact was equally significant in the areas of training (hundreds of workshops, training courses and study tours at many levels), documentation (publications, video films and CDs), and regional co-operation (seminars and consultancies).

Special mention may be made of BOBP's third phase which focused on fisheries management: that is a major priority of fisheries everywhere even today. The Program's work led to a gradual change in perception of fisheries management in the region. Once advocated only reluctantly, fisheries management is one of today's buzzwords. The Program's work in community-based fisheries management (CBFM), particularly in Thailand and India, and in introducing and promoting the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, is very relevant today – in fact it needs to be strengthened.

Three workplans were approved at the Governing Council meeting – Capacity-Building and Information

Services for Fisheries Development and Management in the Bay of Bengal Region; Women in Fisheries; and Fisheries Resources Management. These will serve as modest but important landmarks in the BOBP's ongoing effort at enabling and catalysing sustainable fisheries development and management in small-scale fisheries. All workplans relate to the period October 2004-December 2005.

Capacity-Building and Information Services for Fisheries Development and Management in the Bay of Bengal Region

This project will be a part of the BOBP-IGO's mandate to assist member-countries in strengthening their national capabilities in development and management of coastal fisheries.

- The marine fisheries technical guidelines of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries: Vernacular versions will be prepared and printed for dissemination in member-countries.
- A national workshop on implementation of the CCRF will be organised in Sri Lanka. (Similar workshops have been

organised in Bangladesh, India and the Maldives.)

- A Regional Information Network is to be set up through the BOBP-IGO website. It will provide information on development, planning, research and training. These will assist member-countries in strengthening their capabilities in development and management of coastal fisheries.
- A fishermen's week is to be organised in member-countries to help promote a participatory and community-based system to manage fisheries and aquatic resources.
- Information dissemination: **Bay of Bengal News** and other publications will be prepared and disseminated. These will serve to inform, enthuse and bind governments and other fisheries stakeholders in the region. Information will also be disseminated through the Organisation's website – www.bobpigo.org.

Women in Fisheries

This project will include both desk reviews and field work. It will review the status of women in coastal fishing communities in Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka, and the effectiveness of projects/interventions carried out so far to help these women. (A review has already been completed for India.) There will be a special focus on improving the livelihood opportunities of these women. Reports based on the reviews will be prepared. A national workshop will

Meeting of Heads of Government Cites BOBP-IGO

Six Prime Ministers and a President met recently in Bangkok. This was for the first summit meeting of BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), held on 31 July 2004. The Prime Ministers were from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Thailand, the President from Sri Lanka.

One of the few organisations cited by this VVIP meeting was the BOBP-IGO. The leaders agreed that they should strengthen co-operation in promoting the sustainable use of marine resources in the Bay of Bengal. They stressed that management and conservation was necessary, in close coordination with existing frameworks such as the Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation, BOBP-IGO.

We welcome the leaders' observations. We will be happy to coordinate with Governments and institutions in the region to promote sustainable management of marine resources.

discuss the findings of the reviews and formulate an action plan to address issues and problems.

Fisheries Resources Management

This project aims at stemming resource depletion in the coastal waters of member-countries, and at promoting responsible fisheries practices. Elements of the project:

- Assessment of the marine fishing fleet of member-countries. Information will be collected on the status of the fleet and its optimisation *vis-a-vis* resource availability.
- Organisation of a regional consultation on monitoring, control and surveillance. The consultation will improve understanding of needs and methods and options, and lead to regional action plans.
- Preparation of a management plan for one commercial fishery in each member-country.

Several useful suggestions were made at the Governing Council meeting.

They related, for example, to improving the safety of fishermen at sea, strengthening fish stock assessment, reducing post-harvest losses. BOBP has already done commendable work in these areas, and recommendations for action plans already exist.

Funding is of course vital, if the full potential of the BOBP-IGO is to be tapped. The many countries and institutions that supported the BOBP's array of activities during the first three phases, should continue promoting the causes they initiated, in the best interests of sustainable development and management of fisheries in the Bay of Bengal.

– Y S Yadava

Balancing the future of fishers with the cost of progress and the benefits of economic gain has been an area of concern for the global fishing industry. And BOBP-IGO is committed to managing change and partnering with stakeholders for a brighter tomorrow.

