

As Others See *Bay of Bengal News*

Here's a sampling of some reactions to Bay of Bengal News on the occasion of its completing a quarter century.

“Always different from other publications”

In the first half of the 1980s, when I was Training and Extension Officer, of the BOBP, its newsletter was read with great interest within and outside the Bay of Bengal region. Many of its readers were active players in development.

During these early years of small-scale fisheries development in the Bay of Bengal, *Bay of Bengal News* stimulated debate on a number of innovative and challenging issues – such as the role of women in the development of rural communities; the consideration of economic and social concerns *vis-à-vis* a simple transfer of technology; access of rural communities to rural infrastructure and services; as well as the need to adapt technologies and methods to the needs and circumstances of small-scale fishers and fish farmers.

Bay of Bengal News has always been different from other development publications. The most important difference is probably that the readers of BBN became a part of



the wide spectrum of partners and stakeholders who took part in the BOBP's development initiatives.

Thus, a long-term relationship was established between readers and the newsletter. This may be one of the reasons why readers still remember articles in the *Bay of Bengal News* long after they appeared, and why the BBN has had a long-lasting impact on many of its readers.

To cite an example. I attended the World Congress on Agricultural and Rural Finance in Addis Ababa, held on November 25 – 27, 2005. After my presentation on the prospects and challenges of agricultural and rural finance in Asia and the Pacific, representatives of several financial institutions approached me and asked whether I had been associated with the fishery credit activities of the BOBP. Reference was made, among other things, to articles in *Bay of Bengal News*. I was certainly pleased to confirm my association!

It is interesting to note that the principles that guided the successful credit programmes for fishing communities in Orissa (“Bank credit for fisherfolk: Orissa sets an example”. BBN, March 1984), have now been widely adopted by most agricultural and rural banks in Asia for their rural credit and microfinance operations.

When visiting Orissa again two decades later in 2005 on a mission for FAO, I was pleasantly surprised to see that the Marine Fisheries Extension Service (MFES) which I had helped to establish in the first half of the 1980s, was still operating. Staff of the MFES were aware of the past history and achievements of the service, probably due to the article “In-service training of Orissa extension officers: an assessment” in the June 1985 issue of *Bay of Bengal News*.

I was also pleased to learn that the efforts to raise the literacy and awareness levels among Orissa fisher communities – which I helped through the BOBP – were now being continued by NGOs.

Members of both NGOs and the marine fisheries extension service, remembered the *Bay of Bengal News* articles on the non-formal primary education curriculum introduced by BOBP in the beginning of the 1980s – such as “Orissa fisherfolk children learn the 3 R's and more”, BBN, December 1984, by S R Madhu and “Orissa fisherfolk children – a first rate performance”, BBN December 1985, by Namita Ray.

These articles had obviously succeeded in promoting educational efforts among Orissa's fishing communities – which in turn are helping fisherfolk improve their livelihoods, their participation in local government, their conservation and management of natural resources.

– *Uwe Tietze*
Fisheries Consultant, USA
(formerly Fisheries Industries Officer, FAO Rome)

“The only formal source of fisheries news in the Maldives”

Bay of Bengal News has been a very important source of information dissemination on coastal traditional fisheries issues in the region. It has always focused on the most critical regional fisheries and aquaculture development issues, fishing craft, gear and methods. BBN is probably the only formal publication with news and features on Maldivian fisherfolk and on socio-economic issues. I would not hesitate to characterize BBN as the voice of information on fisheries in the Bay of Bengal region.

I congratulate all those who have contributed to the production of BBN regularly over the past 25 years – especially Dr Y S Yadava, who has worked tirelessly to compile such valuable banks of

information. I think it would be worthwhile to PDF all the back issues and make them available on your website in a searchable form.

– **Abdulla Naseer**
*Executive Director,
Ministry of Fisheries, Agriculture &
Marine Resources, Maldives*

BOBP and the BBN

The BOBP during its past 25 years has filled a huge gap in fisheries development. Until this Programme came to the scene, marine fisheries focused routinely on fishing and technology-related issues. Socio-economics was limited to data collection and statistics. The BOBP's many studies and programmes brought little-known socio-economic aspects to the fore. *Bay of Bengal News* explained and summarized such studies with clarity, conviction and charm.

I think the BOBP's work has not been utilized wisely. Its findings – reported and analysed so well in *Bay of Bengal News* and the many technical reports – have not been examined, let alone implemented. Reasons? Possibly lethargy, lack of finance for follow-up, lack of staff, lack of planning, lack of understanding about the seriousness of various issues. Whatever the reasons, the BOBP's good work has not fully translated into benefits for fisherfolk.

BBN and other publications of the BOBP ought to have been translated from English to the vernacular. The messages on overfishing, management, diversification, coastal aquaculture, post-harvest handling, processing for value addition, marketing of fish catch, basic infrastructure, fisherfolk problems, technology upgradation, etc, have reached only a few.

Studies and pilot projects, however good, are not enough. They merely adorn bookshelves. Only field-level implementation on a wide-scale can make an impact on fisheries and fisherfolk. The BOBP should not depend on Government agencies for

actual implementation. It has tried implementation in a small way; with its small budget, it could not do more.

A few demonstrations in a few fishing villages don't go far. BOBP should have adopted a few fisher villages and made them show-windows for holistic development. This would have caught the attention of Government agencies and induced large-scale replication. *Bay of Bengal News* could have helped the process.

In future, BOBP should put more effort into weaning fishers away from fishing and induce them to take up coastal aquaculture and seafarming. Polyculture of shrimp, mudcrab, Chanos/ mullets and seaweed; seaweed farming in the open sea; cage culture of finfishes in wave-resistant cages in the open sea; bivalve farming in coastal waters – these should be promoted as livelihoods of promise in India. I hope to read about these efforts in *Bay of Bengal News*.

The coastal aquaculture and mariculture technology of Southeast Asia and China should be introduced in India through demonstration and training. Livelihood support programmes should be organized to rehabilitate estuarine and inshore traditional fishermen who harvest juveniles in bag/ stake nets, or carry out shore seining or dynamite/ cyanide fishing. Successful programmes in



one or two villages will serve as a model for more.

I'm all admiration for the many attractive articles in *Bay of Bengal News* illustrated with photographs, sketches and diagrams. They have been very effective communication tools. I would also like to congratulate BOBP's staff over the years. If the Programme carries out some of the suggestions I have mentioned, the impact on small-scale fisheries and fisher communities will be huge.

– **M Sakthivel**
*President, Aquaculture
Foundation of India, Chennai*

Declining Appetite for Responsible Fisheries Management

During its third phase from 1995, the BOBP tirelessly promoted the virtues of fisheries management, and tried out an array of initiatives in all the seven member-countries. These were often discussed in *Bay of Bengal News*. The response was good. But where is management now?

The appetite for fish (used generically to include food and non-food fish) continues to grow. International trade in fish products alone is worth about US\$ 71 billion annually. This appetite would even be greater if fish prices are lower. However, interest and commitment to manage the fisheries do not seem to grow in tandem. In the field, on the ground, very little management is visible. It is business as usual, whether on shore or in the sea.

In fact, the appetite for responsible management of the fisheries has declined since the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries was first introduced in 1995. After a flurry of activities in the name of responsible fishery in the early years of the Code, not much has happened.

Everywhere, fish catch is declining, and fishers are struggling to cope. Fisher incomes may have increased at times, from higher prices stemming in part from growing

global appetite for fish. But after more than 10 years since the Code of Conduct was brought into being, management activity is still largely confined to talks and Power Point presentations. If any 'management' activity goes beyond the four walls, it is only for a field trip or quick visit to a site where the management process is stage-managed.

Even at the international level, interest in management matters has declined just like the fish landings. So has commitment to management. At best, half-hearted old measures are repeated. No imaginative and exciting initiatives are in the works or on the drawing board.

After the early excitement and enthusiasm for the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, we have hardly started to walk the talk on responsible management.

But BOBP and *Bay of Bengal News* ought to continue the crusade for fisheries management. Who knows, there will be better times, and we will actually see some action.

– **Kee-Chai Chong**

(Director of BOBP from 1995 to 2000, now a Consultant)

Bay of Bengal News, a boon for extension workers

This incident happened around 1993. The Collector of East Godavari District, who was reviewing the performance of different line departments, suddenly turned to the officer in charge of fisheries and asked him, point-blank: "So where do we stand with the FADs?"

The officer was taken aback – it was too sudden and, frankly, he had no idea what FADs were and where the District Collector had picked them up. It was a time few people even in the fisheries department had heard of the fish aggregation devices or what they were supposed to do. Fortunately, the Collector was in a good mood and actually took the trouble to explain to the hapless junior bureaucrat that he'd read

about the FADs in an issue of the *Bay of Bengal News* while he had been working in another coastal district and the article had stayed in his memory all this time. "Do you think you could get me a copy of the BBN that carried the article so I can read it again?" he requested the fisheries officer.

The officer assured the Collector that he would do his best and, knowing that I maintained a collection of the BOBP publications, rushed to my office at the conclusion of the meeting. His first comment when he saw me was, "Did you know that the Collector has a fad for FADs, whatever they are?" He borrowed the relevant issue of BBN and read the article carefully, complaining, "Who knows what he might ask next?" before going back to the Collector's office waving the newsletter like a prize trophy!

My association with the BOBP had started even before *Bay of Bengal News* came into existence. I had been working since May 1980 with a team of specialists. We were involved in designing, developing and testing the prototypes of a new batch of beachlanding crafts (which would eventually give rise to the IND-20 and its other variants that would become so common along the east coast of India over the next decade) when I received my copy of

the first issue of the *Bay of Bengal News*.

I remember I flipped through its pages rather casually, assuming it to be one of those 'in-house' publications given to self-promotion and gave it no further thought at the time. It was only with the second or third issues that my curiosity was stirred and I realised that the *Bay of Bengal News* was no run-of-the-mill journal – it had a sharp focus on small-scale fishers and their livelihood issues. It was pleasantly surprising to see the BBN devoting many pages in each issue to discuss the diversity and complexity that characterise life in a fishing community, aided in no small measure by magnificent black-and-white photographs as well as even more beautiful illustrations that would come to be recognised as 'BOBP Art' – so top-class that they remain unmatched to this day.

Naturally, it took the magazine a very short time to reach all levels of administration in Andhra Pradesh – from the Principal Secretary to the Government right down to the fisheries field personnel in the remote coastal villages – encompassing *en route* the District Collectors, the district-level officers of fisheries, rural development and other line departments, financial institutions as well as research and academic institutions.



The elegant and thoughtful layouts, and the many photographs and illustrations, made the pages easy on the eye. Additional incentives like the lack of distractions (such as advertisements) meant that it was soon competing rather successfully against the few commercial fisheries journals we had in the country. It was not unusual for District Collectors to prepare themselves for a meeting with a visiting expert by quickly going through some back issues of the BBN. I can vouch from personal experience of not only being there when this happened, but of also being the supplier of the relevant journals myself. It was sometimes difficult to get the magazines back, but I was no stickler for protocol when it came to retrieving my precious collection.

The BBN covered most important developments concerning fishing crafts, gear, aquaculture, fishery resources, fishermen and their socio-economics, all of which were quite vital for development policy making and implementation, so it almost became compulsory reading for everyone in fisheries. True, the other publications of the BOBP provided more exhaustive and detailed information on various issues, but *Bay of Bengal News* provided chunk-sized bytes of easily-digestible information that went down well with the non-‘fishy’ types in the administration.

For the ‘fishy’ bunch, which included me, the importance of the BBN also lay in the fact that it was helping us to upgrade our knowledge on different issues and taking us into new and as yet uncharted territories like fisheries management, coastal aquaculture and, perhaps most significant of all, the socio-economic spheres of life in fisheries.

The energy that the BBN developed through the 1980s seemed to have been dissipated by the early 1990s. There was a sizeable reduction in the number of people receiving the newsletter, probably due to funding constraints. It continued to come out

regularly, but its reach was confined to a much smaller circle of people and those who had been left out were justifiably upset. I was one of the casualties of the ‘cull’.

If you had been a frequent reader of a particular journal that suddenly decided to fold up or refuse to send you your copy, you’d understand how I’d felt. I find the need to read many of the back issues of the *Bay of Bengal News* even now, for professional reasons as well as out of nostalgia, and I do seem to find them more valuable with each reading. Once again, it is on the nostalgia front that the other publications brought out by the BOBP cannot beat the BBN, which remains a magnificent collation of people, events, things, projects and so much more that made life look so exciting and interesting!

Anyway, it is my fervent hope and desire that, as it enters the 26th year, BBN will reach out to new readers and provide them with the same information-edge that people of my generation received from it.

– S B Sarma

*Assistant Director (Retired)
Department of Fisheries,
Andhra Pradesh*

“Bridging the gap between the local and the global”

The objectives of BBN were to inform fishery specialists, administrators and laymen about BOBP’s work, and in this it was quite effective. Over the years there have been several interesting articles in BBN – on the need to ban bottom trawling, on fishermen cooperative societies, on costs and earnings of fishermen in Kerala, on fisherfolk from Phang Nga Bay in Thailand voluntarily surrendering pushnets for gillnets, on the problems faced in Besant Nagar fish market, on issues of shrimp culture on the Indian East Coast, and so on.

BBN has tried to bridge the gap between the local and the global and

has carried information on local developments as well as developments at the international level – the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, international instruments on the safety of fishing vessels, etc. BBN has certainly made for informative reading. It has also carried reports on the various trials undertaken by BOBP to improve fishing gear technologies in the region. Perhaps some of the articles – on beach-landing crafts and high-opening bottom trawls, for instance – were more promotional than informative. It would have been interesting to carry different perspectives on the pros and cons of these technologies.

No doubt a publication such as BBN had an important role, particularly as it enhanced the visibility of small-scale fisheries and their communities, and notably of women in the fisheries sector. It continues to serve as an important reference material on the fisheries in the Bay of Bengal region. It can be effectively used by projects and policy-makers, to learn from past experiences, positive and negative.

– Chandrika Sharma

*Executive Secretary,
International Collective in Support
of Fishworkers. Chennai*

