

Making of the Bay of Bengal Programme – Inter- Governmental Organisation

The signing of the Bay of Bengal Programme Inter- Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO) agreement by Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka is a historical moment for the region. It institutionalises a 23 year-old externally funded programme into a self-reliant regional agency that will assist member countries in sustainable coastal fisheries development and management.

On this occasion, I would like to share with readers the long and challenging journey which the BOBP undertook to complete the process of institutionalisation.

Going back to the archives, one may say that the BOBP-IGO seed was sown in January 1995 in Jakarta (*19th Meeting of the Advisory Committee of the BOBP*), which finally culminated in Chennai in April 2003. However, a more direct proposal for institutionalisation of BOBP was made at the 22nd Meeting of the BOBP Advisory Committee (*New Delhi, 1997*), when the head of the Indian delegation in his opening statement said that India foresees a larger role for regional programmes like BOBP and requested FAO to consider institutionalisation of the BOBP as an Inter- Governmental Organisation.

The following year, at the 23rd Meeting of the Advisory Committee held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1998, the matter was raised again and the Committee urged the member countries, the FAO and donors to seriously consider the possibility of evolving an inter- governmental body in the BOB region, to facilitate and enable improved management of fisheries and aquaculture, beyond the project period of the BOBP.

Subsequently, at a country review meeting in June 1999, officials from the Government of India and from India's four east coast states met and urged that BOBP should continue as



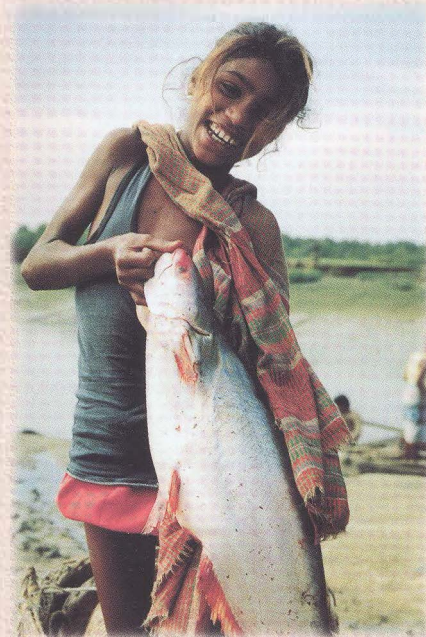
an inter- governmental programme. The officials noted that the region is an important fisheries player in the global scene and any new regional or inter- governmental fisheries agency would take many years to establish. Steps should be taken to assure that at the very minimum, a regional project already existing was not lost to the region.

During the same period, the two BOBP-FAO consultants documenting the learnings from the BOBP's Third Phase clearly showed in their report (*BOBP/REP/85*) that the member countries desired to see the work begun by BOBP continue as an inter- governmental set up.

It was finally at the 24th Meeting of the Advisory Committee in Phuket, Thailand, held in October 1999, that a consensus was arrived at amongst member countries. They strongly endorsed the need to continue the BOBP or to evolve a new regional mechanism capable of addressing critical and important concerns relating to fisheries development and management, both at the policy and implementation-levels. The member countries recommended that the exact nature, mandate, constitution and cost-sharing of such a regional mechanism be evolved through consultation and

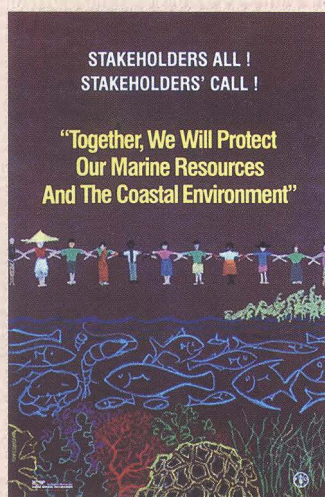
negotiation among representatives of member countries, with assistance and support from the FAO. Concluding the deliberations, the countries adopted the Phuket Resolution on 16 October 1999 (*see box*).

The resolve shown in Phuket was further demonstrated and strengthened in Chennai during 2001, when representatives of the seven member countries, and experts from FAO and other agencies taking part in the Regional Workshop on Sea Safety for Artisanal and Small-Scale Fishermen recommended that the issue of sea



safety could be effectively addressed through a regional mechanism such as the BOBP-IGO (*Bay of Bengal News Vol. III Nos. 2 & 3*).

A formal meeting of Plenipotentiaries was convened in Colombo, Sri Lanka during 28 February - 1 March 2002 to further the process of institutionalisation. The Plenipotentiaries agreed in principle on the establishment of the BOBP-IGO to continue the work of BOBP, and also on the Rules of Procedure, Staff Regulations, Employment Conditions, Schedule of Government Contributions and the Agreement concerning the BOBP-IGO, subject to certain modifications (*BOBP/REP 92*).



The Plenipotentiaries recognised that awareness of the need for, the benefits of and the methods of coastal fisheries management had been considerably strengthened in the region by the efforts of the BOBP, and that such efforts need to be carried forward through the BOBP-IGO. The Plenipotentiaries adopted the Colombo Resolution. Subsequently with the signing of the Agreement at Chennai on 26 April 2003, the process of setting up of the BOBP-IGO has been completed.

The governments of Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka have taken the vital lead in setting up the IGO. The Government of the Republic of Maldives has in principle approved the Agreement to set up the BOBP-IGO and their formal approval is expected in due course. To comprehensively address the fisheries needs of the large marine

ecosystem, the co-operation and support of the other Bay of Bengal countries is equally vital and they are urged to further strengthen the momentum by joining the BOBP-IGO.

Through this brief recap of the journey which the institutionalisation process undertook, I wish to place on record my sincere thanks to all the officials of the member governments with whom I discussed and negotiated the setting up of the BOBP-IGO; FAO

fisheries staff in Rome and Bangkok; officials of the FAO representation in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka (also for the Maldives) and Thailand who provided their unstinted support to the process at every step and arranged for the funds necessary during the bridging period; and my colleagues at the BOBP, past and present, for their wholehearted co-operation in ensuring a successful end to the journey.

Yugraj Singh Yadava

The Phuket Resolution

Conscious of the importance of fisheries and aquatic resources as an essential sector of development of nations surrounding the Bay of Bengal and the unique and relatively high dependence of millions of fishers and coastal peoples on the ocean and coastal environment for their food and livelihood security;

Realising that the fisheries sectors of the countries around the Bay of Bengal have to in the future 1) increase or, at least, stabilize fisheries production to ensure food and livelihood security for a large number of people 2) ensure quality fish and fish products in order not to jeopardize trade, which earns valuable foreign exchange 3) protect themselves from non-tariff trade barriers on fisheries 4) fulfil requirements of agreed-to Conventions and Codes and 5) better manage their fisheries and conserve their aquatic environments to provide sustainability;

Recognising that, while fisheries is primarily a national concern driven by a country's needs, there are a large number of issues in fisheries that can be more appropriately and efficiently addressed in a regional context through collective action;

Recognising that the Bay of Bengal Programme of the FAO of UN has provided valuable and noteworthy services to the countries in the Bay of Bengal region in enabling and facilitating the development and management of small-scale fisheries over the last twenty years and the fact that the project is coming to an end in December 1999;

Realising that there is a need for technical and management advisory services in the areas of fisheries development and management, conservation of aquatic resources, quality assurance of fish and fish products, fair and free trade of fish, fish marketing development, human resources development and building the capacity of national fishery agencies and that the promotion and success of such services can be facilitated through regional co-operation;

Considering that the said co-operation can best be achieved through the establishment of an Inter-Governmental Organisation in the Bay of Bengal region carrying out its activities in collaboration with countries, organisations and commissions that may be able to provide financial and technical support;

We, the Representatives of the Fishery Agencies of the Governments of Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand, having met in Phuket, Thailand, 13-16 October 1999 for the 24th Meeting of the Advisory Committee of the Bay of Bengal Programme of the FAO of UN, now therefore:

Resolve to come together to consider the establishment of an Inter-Governmental Organisation for Technical and Management Advisory Services for Fisheries Development and Management in the Bay of Bengal Region.

Request the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN for advisory and financial support in the formulation and establishment of such an Inter-Governmental Organisation.

Suggest that senior representatives of the fishery agencies of the member countries of the Bay of Bengal Programme of the FAO of UN meet at their earliest convenience to design and develop the constitution and by-laws of the proposed Inter-Governmental Organisation, specifying its mandate, its management and staffing, its fund requirements, and evolve mechanisms and guidelines for cost-sharing.

Phuket, Saturday the 16th day of October 1999.