



Fishermen in Madagascar.



Photo Credit: ICSF

Fisherwomen holding crabs, Brazil.

## ***International Collective in Support of Fishworkers***

THE INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF) is an international non-government organization, based in Chennai (India) and Brussels (Belgium), that works to establish equitable, self-reliant, and sustainable fisheries by defending the rights of fishworkers in the small-scale, artisanal sector. ICSF's mandate is drawn from the historic International Conference of Fishworkers and their Supporters held in Rome in 1984, parallel to the World Conference on Fisheries Management and Development that was organized by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

*For more information about ICSF, see [www.icsf.net](http://www.icsf.net).*

# Aquarian Reform

## The Philippines' SAMMACA

**T**HE COAST OF PAGAPAS BAY in the Philippines traditionally has been the main source of livelihood for the residents of 25 fishing communities. Until the 1980s, the bay was a common-property resource, governed by norms that ensured that it was fished sustainably. Then wealthy Filipino fishing businesses arrived with big boats, big nets, and high-tech equipment. Disregarding the informal rules that the fishing communities had long followed, they overfished the waters and dredged coastal mangrove forests to make fish farms. The fisheries quickly became an open-access resource, where the only rule was 'use it or lose it.'

The privatization of the foreshore between the high-water and low-water marks was the last straw for the fishing communities. Almost 5000 acres were sold to a wealthy landowner who blocked traditional access to the ocean. The new owner built fences, cut mangrove forests, dug private ponds for commercial fish farming, and razed fisher families' homes to make way for a beach resort. In response to these threats to the ecosystem and their livelihoods, the fishing people in 1992 formed SAMMACA (the Association of Small Fisherfolk in Calatagan), a federation of 18 fishing cooperatives along the coast.

SAMMACA's first priority was to educate the fishing communities about their property rights and the local ecology. As the group gained experience and strength, members organized actions to assert their right to coastal access and to prevent further destruction of the local environment. As a result of SAMMACA's organizing efforts, the municipality of Calatagan declared the entire extent of its waters a marine

reserve and prohibited the fishing methods used by industrial trawlers. The Philippines Department of Environment and Natural Resources also intervened, issuing cease-and-desist orders to several of the most environmentally irresponsible fish farms.

SAMMACA's members continue to work to restore the coastal environment through projects like mangrove reforestation and the construction of artificial reefs. Each cooperative also



Artwork Credit: SAMMACA

runs credit assistance programs, manages stores for fishing and household supplies, and helps transport fish to the market. As SAMMACA's members can testify, open-access resources – in which no one has the responsibility of environmental stewardship – lead not only to overuse but also to unequal access. SAMMACA has demonstrated that an equitable distribution of rights can provide the foundation for sustainable use of resources.

Fishing communities have organized to prevent further destruction of the coastal environment.