

**NGOS AND THE INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF MEMBERSHIP ORGANISATIONS: THE CASE OF  
THE QUILON FISHERMEN WELFARE SOCIETY**

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**SUMMARY**

Recent shifts in NGO and donor priorities make it important to understand how NGOs promote membership organisations. As a means of exploring this issue, this paper uses the example of the largely successful NGO attempts to help South Indian fishermen organise in response to technical change. Key factors are found to have contributed to the process of institutional development that has taken place. A strong indigenous NGO presence has provided continuity, enabling international NGOs to confine themselves to the financial and technical functions that they are best able to discharge. A clear core of mutually supporting activities has been identified around which people have been able to organise. At the same time, institutional development is revealed to be a long-term undertaking, which depends at least partly on chance, and in which difficult trade-offs may have to be made between equity and sustainability.

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# **1 NGOs AND THE INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF MEMBERSHIP ORGANISATIONS**

## **1.1 The Issues**

Where NGOs were once content to confine themselves to relatively small-scale interventions, increasingly they now seek to 'scale up' the impact of their work (Edwards and Hulme 1992). The promotion of strong membership organisations, which over time can progressively take on more of the functions that NGOs would previously have discharged, has been identified as one of the means by which this objective might be achieved. Growing NGO interest in this possibility has coincided with the emergence of a wider donor concern to foster democratic institutions and a more vibrant civil society.

Whilst we already know quite a lot, in more general terms, about the characteristics of strong local organisations (Carroll 1992; Esman and Uphoff 1984), the current literature tells us less about how they arise, and still less about the role NGOs can play in helping to facilitate their emergence. The case to be presented here forms part of an international study funded by the British Department for International Development (DFID) which seeks to throw light on this issue.<sup>1</sup>

## **1.2 The Case in Outline**

This study concerns the joint efforts of Indian and international NGOs to support the emergence of the Quilon Fishermen Welfare Society (FWS) in the state of Kerala. The study attempts both to document the strategies that have been used and to determine the extent to which it has been possible to achieve institutional outcomes that are at once sustainable, broadly equitable, and reasonably cheap. The case study provides a good example of the complementary roles that different types of NGO can play in supporting institutional development, but also illustrates the complex and problematic nature of the processes involved.

What follows falls into four sections. We begin, in Section 2, by exploring the nature of traditional artisanal fishing production systems and social organisation; we show how these have been threatened by the introduction of mechanised trawling from the early 1960s onwards. Section 3 describes how new technologies and organisations have been developed, with NGO help, to counteract this threat. Section 4 analyses the ways in which the interests of different groups of people have been affected by these changes. Section 5 draws out more general lessons about the ways in which, and the extent to which, it is possible for NGOs to assist in the institutional development of membership organisations.

## **1.3 Methods**

Data were assembled in a number of ways. A range of secondary materials was consulted, and we were able to build on earlier work carried out by one of the authors with various former colleagues at the Centre for Management Development (Balakrishnan *et al.* 1992 1993; Gopakumar and Kumar 1994a, 1994b). Lengthy interviews were conducted with staff of the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS) and the Quilon FWS itself. Additional data were generated through a series of rapid rural appraisal (RRA) exercises, conducted with some twenty-five men and women informants drawn from some of the villages where the society functions.

## **2 FROM TRADITION TO TRAWLERISATION**

### **2.1 Communities, Environment and Technology**

Quilon Bay lies towards the southern end of the Kerala coastline, in India's richest fishing grounds. Five artisanal fishing villages have grown up along the shore, forming an almost continuously settled belt, with a population of some 30,000 people. Most local people are Catholics, and the Church has traditionally exercised a powerful influence over their lives.

Until quite recently, the bay has offered unusually favourable conditions for fishing, with demersal and pelagic species both found in relative abundance close to the shore. Despite this advantage, artisanal fishing here, as elsewhere, has remained an insecure and hazardous livelihood, and the people are amongst the poorest in the state.

A variety of craft have traditionally been used (see Table 1). By far the most common were the dugout canoes, which usually had between two and four crew members. Some dugouts would be used for shore seining, providing limited employment opportunities for those who either lacked the necessary skills or were too old, or too weak, to go to sea themselves. There were also a few one-person dugouts (*thoni*). The other craft to be found in significant numbers were the raft-type *kattumarams*, which had a relatively poor carrying capacity, but could operate in far rougher conditions than dugouts.

### **2.2 Economic and Social Relations**

Boat ownership was concentrated in the hands of about 20 per cent of households, whilst the remainder worked as crew. Generally observed rules governed the division of the catch between owners and crew. Whilst owners enjoyed a rather higher status in the community, opportunities for accumulation were limited. Few possessed more than a single craft, and they were usually only marginally better off than their crew. The difficult and uncertain environment served to foster the formation of strong mutual support mechanisms (Abraham 1985).

Although largely free of internal class divisions, communities were much more clearly differentiated in terms of gender. Men had exclusive responsibility for all work related to fishing, with the partial exception of more minor marketing activities, whilst women were expected to carry out all reproductive tasks. At the same time, men controlled all major assets, with women enjoying no more than limited access to family savings and more minor items. Community organisations exhibited a similar pattern of male domination.

Marked inequalities were also apparent in the relations between the community as a whole and the wider economy. Merchants controlled the marketing of fish, and were able to take advantage of their position to keep prices low. Lacking access to formal credit, and finding it difficult to generate sufficient savings to replace their boats and gear, fishermen were also vulnerable to exploitation by moneylenders, who typically charged interest rates of 40 per cent a year. The powerful position of the merchants and the moneylenders was reinforced by their close links to the hierarchy of the Church, and to the Congress Party.

### **2.3 Trawlerisation and Its Effects, 1965–1985**

Such was the situation at the beginning of the 1960s, when trawlers began to appear in significant numbers for the first time. The new craft were much larger and more mobile than their traditional counterparts, and

employed more active fishing methods. These proved particularly well adapted to catching prawns, which had previously been of little significance, but were to attract a rapidly growing international market through the 1960s and 1970s. This new market, in turn, drew Kerala's powerful merchant class into the industry for the first time. Further encouragement was provided by various forms of government support, and the size of the Kerala trawler fleet increased from around 200 in the mid-1960s, to 2,800 by 1985 (Kurien and Achari 1990; Meynen 1989).

For a time, this expansion was accompanied by a growth in the total catch, but by the early 1970s, the sustainable yield had been exceeded, and catch volumes began to decline. The artisanal sector was severely affected, as trawlers now began to encroach into the shallow waters which had previously been the exclusive preserve of traditional craft; in so doing, the trawlers destroyed the breeding grounds of young fish, and often damaged artisans' nets.

Many traditional fishermen now found that they were unable to compete, and some were forced to go and work on the trawlers themselves. A few of the better-educated were able to take advantage of the opportunities that were beginning to arise for employment in the Middle East, but their departure was not enough to relieve the pressure on those who remained. Poor women, who survived by selling from door to door and in local markets, were particularly badly affected by the reduction in supplies. Everybody suffered from the reduced availability of fish for home consumption, but the burden fell most heavily on women in their reproductive roles.

Communities first reacted to this gathering crisis with individual acts of violence and resistance directed against trawler owners. But gradually a more organised response began to emerge. This had its roots in developments that had begun some time earlier in the neighbouring district of Trivandrum.

### **3 THE EVOLUTION OF FISHERMEN ORGANISATIONS**

#### **3.1 Early Developments in Trivandrum District**

The story begins in the early 1960s, when radical elements in the Catholic Church set up a development wing to promote the interests of fishing communities. A small number of lay staff were appointed and given the task of creating the new community of Marianad, which was to serve as a laboratory where innovations could be tested.

It was here that a new auction system, which could be controlled and operated by fishermen for their own benefit, was devised. This proved popular, and with the support of international NGOs the idea soon spread to other parts of Trivandrum, and the neighbouring district of Kanyakumari. The development wing was now provided with additional resources, and allowed to transform itself into an autonomous voluntary organisation, named the Programme for Community Organisation (PCO), so that the work could be carried forward.

By this stage, a need for larger and more collective organisations that could combat the growing threat posed by trawlers was becoming apparent. With this end in mind, the PCO helped to establish the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS) as a district umbrella body based in Trivandrum, and this, in turn, was then able to encourage the formation of further groups (Cherail *et al.* 1991). At the same time, in a move that was designed to prise fishing communities away from the control of more conservative elements in the Church hierarchy, the PCO collaborated with radical priests to establish a trade union (Meynen 1989).

Recruitment to the new body was rapid. With a sympathetic left-front government now in power at the state level, the new trade union was able to lobby successfully for legislation confining trawlers to deeper waters, and banning their use entirely during the critical monsoon season; much further campaigning was to be required, however, before this could actually be implemented.

These developments were viewed with concern by powerful supporters of the Congress Party, and when the party was returned to power in 1982, measures were taken to try to contain the trade union's influence. Foremost among these was an attempt to head off opposition to trawlerisation by offering credit which would enable artisans to purchase outboard motors (OBMs), and thus begin to compete on a more equal basis. This offer provided the final element in the equation that was to shape the course of subsequent events in Quilon.

### **3.2 The Genesis of the Quilon Fishermen Welfare Society: 1975–1985**

In 1979, a young novice named Kattickaran was sent to work in the Quilon area by Don Bosco, a Catholic sect that specialised in development activities. Kattickaran had been heavily influenced by liberation theology and, like the PCO and its partners, he believed that fishing communities would have to be freed from the influence of the conservative Church hierarchy if genuine progress was to be achieved.

With this end in mind, and with financial support from the Dutch NGO CEBEMO, Kattickaran helped first to set up the Fishermen Community Development Project (FCDP). Operations were supervised by a governing council and an executive committee, but members were all nominated by Kattickaran himself, who thus retained effective control. Part of the FCDP's work addressed immediate practical needs, but the new organisation was also used as a vehicle for raising political awareness.

Shortly after it had been established, representatives were sent to Marianad for training in marketing operations. They returned to set up a fish marketing centre (FMC) in Pallithottam in 1982, with the other villages in the bay following suit in 1983. Each was run along similar lines. Fishermen first formed themselves into neighbourhood-based sanghams, each of which appointed its own auctioneer. An auction site was then established in each village under the supervision of a committee made up of elected representatives from the sanghams. FMC members simultaneously agreed to become members of the trade union, to which they contributed through a percentage deduction from the value of their catch.

As these structures were being established, the Congress government was already beginning to implement its plan to create new opportunities for artisans. The use of outboard motors excited considerable interest in the communities, but it quickly became apparent that these could not readily be used with traditional craft. It was only when a new ply-craft was developed by SIFFS and the UK Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), and a boatyard was established in Pallithottam at which these could be produced, that widespread adoption of the new technology became possible (Campbell and George 1993).

Kattickaran was quick to perceive the threat the government credit package might pose to the organisations he had been nurturing, and to reflect on how it might be made use of in a way that would support his broader objectives. These required that the widest possible level of participation be achieved, and this would clearly not be consistent with an initiative directed only towards a boat-owning minority. His solution was to persuade boat owners to enter into a new system of joint ownership with their former crew members; to provide the necessary

leverage, he used his capacity to broker access to the credit that would be needed to acquire both the boats and engines.

Groups were duly formed and initial credits were secured, with loanees then making repayments through the FMCs by a fixed percentage deduction from each catch. By the end of 1986 a large number of OBMs had been acquired, and membership of the FMCs had risen to almost 2,000. For a time everything worked smoothly, but the emergence of a popular new system, which the Catholic Church did not control caused growing concern in the Church. To limit the new system's influence, the Church decided to set up a rival organisation, which it named the Quilon Social Services Society (QSSS). Kattickaran responded by accelerating the FCDP/FMC credit programme as rapidly as he could. Together with other factors this contributed to a rapid acceleration in the rate of motorisation.

The volume of work generated in securing and administering the additional credit quickly imposed an excessive burden on the FCDP. In 1984, a decision was therefore taken to establish a new body, the Quilon Fishermen Welfare Society (FWS), to shoulder the additional responsibility. Salaried staff were taken on, with part of the cost being met by an increase in the fishermen's contributions; but initially the FWS had to rely upon CEBEMO to cover about 75 per cent of its total budget, and money still had to be channelled to the FWS through the FCDP (see Table 2).

The work of the FWS was overseen by a general council comprising all the FMCs' representatives, who in turn elected an executive committee. But fearing that local leadership capacities were not yet sufficiently far developed, Kattickaran retained the chairmanship, and with it the overall control of the organisation, including the power to co-opt other members.

### **3.3 Emerging Problems, 1985–1986**

Shortly after the Quilon FWS had been established and registered, it joined with its counterparts in Trivandrum and Kanyakumari to form a reconstituted South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies. This was supported by funding from the ITDG and NORAD, and controlled by a committee elected by the representatives of each of the three member organisations. There was also a trade union representative and various other co-opted members. Released from its previous responsibilities in Trivandrum, which were now taken over by another body, the new SIFFS was now able to assume the role of a tertiary body, concentrating on research and technology development. Its services were soon to be required, as the new OBMs began to break down with increasing frequency.

This quickly led to a situation where repayments could not be met, owners started to default, and the banks began to refuse any new loans. In Quilon, the immediate effect was a dramatic decline in FWS membership. Unresolved tensions from the preceding period of rapid change now began to surface, and the relationship between the FWS and the FCDP was placed under severe strain. Kattickaran was left in a particularly exposed position, and lacking the wider support he required, ultimately resigned from both organisations, and left the area. Shortly afterwards a decision was made to allow the FWS to break away from the FCDP and to take on much greater responsibility for running its own affairs.

### **3.4 Revival and Reconstruction, 1987–90**

Initially, this left the FWS in a highly vulnerable position which could easily have led to its early collapse, but for a number of reasons the split instead marked a turning point in the FWS's fortunes.

Of critical importance was the support provided by SIFFS and Intermediate Technology. Working together, the two organisations set up engine and boat repair programmes which reduced expenses and downtime. Together with the boatyard itself, these were then handed over to FWS, thereby helping to diversify and strengthen its economic base. CEBEMO also played an important part, first diverting the money that had previously been channelled through the FCDP to go directly to the FWS itself, and then substantially upgrading the level of its support. This helped to cover administrative costs and to provide members with credit. Funding was also provided subsequently for a meeting hall and for FMC offices, some of which the FWS was allowed to convert into additional credit.

The position of the FWS was further strengthened by a favourable shift in external circumstances. The implementation, from 1988 onwards, of more effective monsoon fishing bans helped stocks to recover and led to improved catches. In combination with rising fish prices, this brought about a rapid increase in the value of the artisanal catch, and placed the organisation on a much firmer financial footing.

The FWS and its members were also able to instigate some important changes themselves once the link with the FCDP had been broken. Critically, in most cases, groups within the FWS opted to revert to an individual system of boat ownership, which had the effect of returning managerial control to the hands of those best equipped to exercise it. At the same time, finances were placed on a sounder footing with a new long-term savings scheme for the replacement of engines, and a lean-season saving scheme introduced to meet more immediate consumption requirements. A new and more democratic system was also instigated enabling members to elect their own chairman, and eliminating co-opted appointments.

As a result, the FWS entered the 1990s in a much stronger position than could have been anticipated in 1987. Membership had stabilised, and for the first time since mechanisation began, members were actually repaying more in loans than they were borrowing. Their contributions were now sufficient to cover all recurrent FMC costs, although CEBEMO's help was still required to run the FWS office.

### **3.5 Diversification 1990–1995**

The FWS's new-found strength has enabled it to embark upon a further round of diversification. Members have been able to break the hold that moneylenders previously enjoyed over kerosene distribution by establishing their own depot, which now enables them to purchase their fuel at cost price. Collective bargaining power has also been used to set up arrangements with local merchants, through which members are able to obtain food and other essential consumer items on credit.

These measures have been accompanied by serious attempts to broaden the distribution of benefits beyond the circle of fishermen themselves. Deductions are now made from the value of each catch to provide loans for enterprises set up by women under a joint initiative with the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), and the international NGO Bread for the World. These have been used to support fish-vending and net-making



ventures, and in addition, women have taken responsibility for the kerosene depots. Thrift schemes and other initiatives have also been launched.

The capacity to do all these things indicates a confident and maturing organisation, although progress has not been entirely smooth. Some misappropriation of funds has taken place in the FMCs, but the organisations have ultimately proved strong enough to discipline the individuals in question and retrieve their money. The FMC/FWS system has also had to face the threat posed by QSSS credit schemes, and a government-inspired rival, MATSYAFED. By offering favourable terms, these have succeeded in making some inroads into FWS membership, but the damage inflicted has been limited by the failure to create comparable second- and third-tier federal bodies. Having withstood these challenges, the process of diversification within the FWS seems likely to continue.

## **4 COSTS, BENEFITS AND BENEFICIARIES**

### **4.1 Cost**

Leaving aside the cost to the artisanal community itself, we focus here on the contribution made by external agencies (see Table 3). These may be divided into two broad categories. First there are the donor agencies. These are all international, with the exception of SIFFS, which is included because it is almost entirely internationally funded. The other category comprises Indian organisations, and includes both the banks, who have carried the cost of default and overdue repayments; and Don Bosco itself, which has carried the staffing costs associated with the FCDP and the earlier FWS period.

While some of the figures presented in Table 3 are only approximate, the picture that emerges is clear. International contributions account for more than 80 per cent of the total external support, and of these, 70 per cent come from CEBEMO, making it by far the largest individual donor. Taking the present number of members as a base, it is apparent that external support has so far amounted to £169 per head. With support now entering its eleventh year, and after making allowance for the fact that not all agencies have operated throughout the period, this translates into an annual figure of approximately £14. This, in turn, is just over 5 per cent of the average annual income in the community.

### **4.2 Sustainability**

How close has this expenditure brought the FWS to the point where it could survive without CEBEMO and the other agencies that support it less directly? In the narrowest sense, this boils down to the question of the capacity of the organisation to cover its operating costs. Table 2 shows that the FMC/FWS system is becoming less dependent upon external funding: in one recent year it was able to cover as much as 60 per cent of its recurrent costs. With a recent increase in the members' contribution, and the implementation of other measures now under consideration, FWS appears capable of satisfying CEBEMO's expectation that it should eliminate its deficit altogether within the foreseeable future.

This would still leave capital expenditures, and the research and development services provided by SIFFS requiring subsidies, and takes no account of the earlier costs sunk into Marianad and the PCO, without which

the FWS could not have emerged. It is at least arguable, however, that poor fishermen could not reasonably be expected to carry such costs from their current income.

Whether the FWS can maintain or improve upon its present level of performance in the longer term will depend upon a number of factors. For the present, it is clear that its position is much stronger than it was. The auctions allow members to retain a higher share of market price. More reliable outboard motors are now available, together with much-improved repair and maintenance systems. Finances are far better organised and more under members' control than hitherto. For the time being at least, political measures to preserve the fish stock seem to be working, with even the trawler owners coming round to the idea that conservation may be in their own long-term interest.

Set against this is the continuing vulnerability of the small artisan to cyclical variations in fish availability occurring for natural reasons. There is also the constant possibility of adverse movements in market forces, which may affect either the purchased inputs on which artisans increasingly depend, or the prices their produce commands. Furthermore, recent measures to liberalise the Indian economy throw into question the continuing availability of the subsidised loans on which artisans currently depend, and can only serve to increase the dangers, and the underlying uncertainty about the long-term prospects for survival.

### **4.3 Types of Beneficiary**

Overall, then, the position of the artisanal sector is much stronger than previously, though the outlook is uncertain. But it is also necessary to look in more detail at who has benefited, and to what extent. As a first step in sorting out what has happened, the changes in fishing craft and employment that have taken place over the period in question must be traced. This is attempted in Table 1.

As far as craft are concerned, the overall direction of change is reasonably clear. Dugouts dominated before the establishment of the FWS, but were then almost completely displaced by motorised ply-boats; the small number that remain are mainly only used for shore seining. *Kattumarams* and small dugouts, which were found much less frequently than ordinary dugouts in the past, have withstood motorisation better, and showed only a modest reduction in numbers to 1994.

FWS members control more than half of motorised craft, together with two thirds of the *kattumarams* and small dugouts. The non-members referred to in Table 1 may be either independent fishermen or members of the QSSS or MATSYAFED schemes. Overall, FWS members are far more numerous than those of either other body. Finally, Table 1 shows that the overall number of boats was reduced by a substantial margin in the decade to 1994, but that this was counterbalanced almost exactly by an increase in the number of men engaged by each craft. The impact on employment of the technical and other changes that have taken place on employment thus appears to be neutral, although this statement does not take account of the possibility that changes may have taken place in the average amount of time that each fisherman works.

#### **4.4 Transitions and Types of Benefit**

Table 1 gives a simple before-and-after picture. It is necessary to go more deeply into the major transitions that have taken place from 1984–94, in order to understand how the benefits arising from the FWS have been distributed.

Our calculations indicate that there were probably about 2,300 artisanal fishermen working in the Quilon bay before the FWS came into being in 1984. FWS records indicate that almost 90 per cent of these joined the new organisation, but more than one third subsequently dropped out (leaving a core membership of about 1,200 by 1994). The large majority of those who remained worked motorised craft, and almost all would have been joint owners until the crisis of 1986–87. This situation has now been transformed into a position in which around 120 have become individual owners, about 80 remain in joint ownership arrangements, and the other 800 have reverted to the status of crew.

Among the present fishing population, non-members of FWS comprise the relatively small number who did not join the organisation in the first place, and the rather larger number of subsequent FWS dropouts. The majority of this group are now involved with other motorised craft, whilst a sizeable minority continue to fish using traditional boats.

Table 4 shows how access to the various benefits arising more or less directly from the FMC/FWS system has been distributed between the different categories that have been identified. Almost everybody, irrespective of whether they belong to the FWS or not, has gained from the union-inspired legislation of the early 1980s. It is also apparent that the great majority have benefited from the auction arrangements. QSSS and MATSYAFED ply-boat owners have been able to use the auction as a model for their own systems, and even those with no access at all have enjoyed the general increase in local prices which the auction has helped to bring about.

The numbers that have gained directly from the new technology and credit package are a little lower. But once again, they extend beyond the FWS to members of other organisations that would not have come into being if there had been no FWS to oppose in the first place. By contrast, it is only the circle of FWS members who have access to the more recent savings and credit schemes that have been set up. The number actually able to exert strong influence over FWS decision making and hence the future distribution of benefits is much smaller still.

In sum, a large part of the range of benefits arising from the FWS extends well beyond its own membership, and the benefits enjoyed exclusively by FWS members at present only give them a fairly small material advantage over the owners and operators of equivalent craft from outside the organisation. This gap may grow, however, as the FWS engages in further diversification. At the same time, there is the possibility that control will in future become increasingly concentrated in a rather smaller number of hands.

#### **4.5 The Magnitude of Benefits**

Identifying the different benefits of the FWS, and the beneficiaries to whom they accrue, is relatively straightforward. Measuring them is more complicated. All that has been attempted here is a simple exercise using social maps and wealth ranking, covering three neighbourhoods in the two villages where the heaviest concentrations of FWS members were found.

The findings from these exercises are presented in Table 5. In all, four wealth categories were identified. At one extreme are those who have been able to accumulate on a significant scale. Next come the modest savers, followed in turn by those at bare subsistence, and below-subsistence levels. When these categories are compared with occupational groupings, there is a marked tendency for clustering to take place at different levels. Thus, the great majority of households where a person is working in the Gulf are accumulating. Similarly, fish vendors, who will normally represent poor female-headed households, and shore seine crew are found almost exclusively in the lower categories.

The different types of households most directly affected by mechanisation are concentrated fairly closely together in the centre of the range. Leading this middle group in wealth are the individual boat owners. A short way below them come the trawler crew. Then there is a further small drop in wealth to motorboat crew, and another to joint owners of motorised boats. When the analysis is extended to take account of changes in wealth status that have taken place since motorisation, no very clear patterns emerge. There does, however, seem to have been rather a lot of mobility between categories. Many former dugout owners, for example, now appear as ply-boat crew, whilst former dugout crew can now be found among the ranks of individual ply-boat owners.

A number of conclusions follow from this. The first is that motorisation has not yet created opportunities for accumulation to take place on a significant scale. Neither has it reached down as far as the poorest strata. The fact that those who have gone to work on trawlers are approximately at the same level as those remaining in the artisanal sector suggests that few people are actually better off, in simple material terms, than they would have been if the FWS had never existed.

The support that has been received cannot therefore be justified in a narrow financial sense. If a case for it is to be made, it will need to be couched in terms of the wider and less tangible benefits inherent in preserving the fabric of a community, in strengthening its capacity to deal effectively with external agencies, and in all that potentially follows from this in terms of its quality of life and capacity to preserve the environment upon which it depends.

#### **4.6 The Implications for Women**

In considering the benefits and beneficiaries of the changes that have been described, account must also be taken of the implications for women.

The picture that emerges here is that only limited and *ad hoc* attempts have been made to incorporate women in most of the institutional developments that have been discussed. In the case of the trade union, women were central to the earlier stages of mobilisation, but faded out of the picture once specific concessions on fish transport had been won. With the FCDP they have fared rather better, with some funds being earmarked for their use, and certain of their practical needs being addressed through savings and consumer credit schemes. They have also benefited from the greater opportunities for association that the FCDP has provided, but nevertheless they have had relatively little say in the overall running of the organisation. The same has been true of the FMCs and the FWC.

Male concerns have therefore tended to dominate the agenda of these organisations from the outset, and no attempt has been made to develop new technologies might benefit women, to complement those introduced

for the fishermen. Thus far, if women have gained at all, this has mainly been as an indirect result of the advantages accruing initially to other family members. It is too early to say whether the recent initiative with SEWA will reverse this trend. The organisation has a strong record in furthering women's strategic interests, but with the exception of the kerosene operation the activities that it has promoted thus far have not significantly extended the range of work possibilities open to women.

## **5 UNDERSTANDING PROCESSES OF INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Whilst questions can be raised about the extent to which different parties have been able to benefit from the FWS, the organisation does appear to be approaching the point where external support could largely be withdrawn without compromising its future survival. To this extent at least, it may be portrayed as an example of successful institutional development. The final section of this paper attempts to explain how this outcome has been brought about, and to derive more general lessons for the way in which NGOs can promote membership organisations.

### **5.1 The Wider Context**

In the first place, it is important to recognise that the micro-level developments that have been traced here have been highly dependent upon the wider political and policy context. Kerala in many ways has provided a very favourable environment for the emergence of fishermen organisations. The closely balanced contest waged in the political arena between the forces of left and right, and the parallel cleavage within the Catholic Church have created a situation where the powerful have been prepared to compete for the support of a poor and previously marginalised group, to an extent that will rarely be found elsewhere. At the same time, the location of the immediate processes that have been described within this wider and volatile political environment, has led to a major element of uncertainty, the implications of which are explored in more detail below.

### **5.2 Indigenous NGO Capacity and Flexible International Support**

The next key lesson concerns the capacity of Indian NGOs and other indigenous bodies to perform key roles. Without the preparatory and support work carried out by the PCO, the more immediate assistance and leadership provided by Don Bosco, and the inputs provided by the SIFFS, very little would have happened by way of institutional development at lower levels. The commitment and knowledge of these agencies, and especially their capacity to engage effectively in political processes, have been of particular significance.

The existence of these strong indigenous bodies has allowed international NGOs to confine themselves to providing the kinds of support for which they are best equipped. Both CEBEMO and the ITDG have played their parts with sensitivity, never seeking to control the course of events but responding in a flexible fashion where their contributions have been needed. With CEBEMO, this has been most evident in its willingness to redirect funding from the FCDP to the FWS when the organisations split. The ITDG has been able to make its specialist technical expertise available at critical junctures, as well as assisting with establishment costs when the SIFFS was first emerging as a rather vulnerable tertiary-level body.

### **5.3 Organisational Focus and Synergy**

Another important element underlying the success that has been achieved was the existence of a clear and immediate core of interests around which organisation could take place. The trade union addressed the central issue of how to regulate the trawlers that were destroying artisanal livelihoods. The FMCs broke exploitative relationships with middlemen, and increased incomes. The FWS undermined the former dependence on moneylenders by making it possible to access official sources of credit. The SIFFS helped to develop new technologies and provided other valued services.

Each of these types and levels of organisation performed complementary functions to produce an effect whose whole was greater than the sum of its individual parts. These advantages and synergies were readily apparent to ordinary members, and led to a willingness to carry much of the financial and other transaction costs of maintaining the structure. This, in turn, helped to keep the emerging organisations reasonably accountable and responsive to members' needs. Finally, with all of this in place, the possibility arose for the FWS to diversify into new activities which served to further strengthen the organisation (Balakrishnan *et al.* 1993).

### **5.4 The Need for Long-term Support**

The advances that have been achieved are substantial, but they have taken time to materialise. The FCDP was able to draw on the innovative work performed by the PCO and its predecessors in establishing the fish marketing system. Similarly, the FWS was able to imitate the model provided by the original SIFFS, and also benefited from the support that this organisation provided. For all of this, it is now almost twenty years since Don Bosco started work with the FCDP, and more than ten since the FWS itself was founded, yet neither have yet attained full financial self-sufficiency.

This clearly indicates that institutional development must be regarded as a long-term undertaking. New ideas need to be developed and piloted. A substantial number of strong primary structures have to be in place before the secondary and tertiary bodies that are essential prerequisites of eventual NGO withdrawal can arise. And once established, these secondary and tertiary bodies in turn have to be nurtured for an extended period if they are to develop in ways that will enable them to perform their intended role.

### **5.5 Chance**

Although the outcomes that have been described owe much to the skill and dedication of the various parties involved, it must also be recognised that chance events have played their part in what has transpired. The formation of the FWS, like the general pace at which local institutions were developed, did not reflect the execution of some precisely thought-out plan, but rather was dictated by the need to find a response to the challenge posed by motorisation. Indeed the attempt to make organisations evolve more rapidly than the local capacity to manage them could easily have led to eventual failure. It was only through the favourable turn in external circumstances that accompanied Kattickaran's departure that it proved possible for the FWS to survive and ultimately to emerge as a stronger, self-governing entity. Institutional development, in other words, must always be a somewhat uncertain undertaking, which does not lend itself to a blueprint approach. This is especially so in cases where micro-level initiatives are intimately bound up with wider political processes.

## **5.6 Trade-offs and the Limits of Success**

Finally, it is important to recognise that the successes that have been achieved are not unqualified. A way of life may have been preserved. It is also true that organisations are now in place that enable people to pursue their interests with greater independence from the mediating influence of the Church hierarchy, and to deal with other powerful external bodies on a more equal footing. But for all this, it cannot be claimed that the fishing community is materially better off as a result of what has happened.

The case has also demonstrated the failure of an attempt to create greater equality, and more participatory structures within communities, through the introduction of new forms of ownership. Similarly, it has proved difficult to integrate those who continue to operate traditional craft into the emerging structures, or to redress previous gender imbalances. The very significant progress that has been achieved in some respects has not, in other words, been reflected in others, and may actually rest upon some of the limitations that have been identified.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

The overall message that emerges is that the institutional development of membership organisations is a complicated, uncertain, and relatively long-term business, even when the configuration of external events appears broadly favourable. The international and Indian NGOs we have considered seem to develop membership organisations rather well, and have clearly made a major contribution to the well-being of a generally poor group of people. This, however, has not been cheap, and neither has it been possible to make significant headway towards achieving greater equity within the communities involved.

For aid donors, the lesson is perhaps even more stark. Assisting in the emergence of strong membership organisations does seem to be a good way of promoting civil society and underwriting democracy. If this is to be done, however, processes must be fostered that fly directly in the face of much current thinking about indicators and target setting, short-term support and withdrawal, and the panoply of devices currently being designed in the name of greater accountability.

**Table 1:** Changes in Craft Used and Fisheries Employed, 1984–94

	<b>Kattumaram</b>	<b>Dugout</b>	<b>Small Dugout</b>	<b>Motorised</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Number of Craft</b>					
1984 <sup>1</sup>	65	688	82	-	835
1994					
FWS <sup>2</sup>	40	8	45	138	231
Other <sup>3</sup>	19	77	22	108	226
Total <sup>4</sup>	59	85	67	246	457
Change <sup>5</sup>	-6	-603	-15	246	-378
<b>Number Employed<sup>6</sup></b>					
1984	98	2064	123	-	2285
1994					
FWS	60	24	68	1035	1187
Other	29	231	33	810	1103
Total	89	255	101	1845	2290
Change <sup>7</sup>	-9	-1809	-22	1845	5

<sup>1</sup>Based on fishermen recall

<sup>2</sup>Fishermen Welfare Society 1994

<sup>3</sup>(4) minus (2)

<sup>4</sup>Derived from South Indian Federation of Fishermen 1991. Assumes no change between 1981 and 1994

<sup>5</sup>The 1984 figure subtracted from the 1994 total.

<sup>6</sup>Assumes average crew of 1.5 for small dugout and *kattumaram*, 3 for dugout, and 7.5 for motorised (4 of

whom will be on the boat at any one time)

<sup>7</sup>Totals may not end up exactly due to rounding

**Table 2:** Paying for FWS Administrative Expenses ('000 rs.)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Cebemo Contribution</b>		<b>Members' Contribution</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Percent</b>	
1985	133	75	45	25	178
1986	133	77	39	23	172
1987	111	63	64	37	175
1988/89	175	66	91	34	266
1989/90	166	63	98	37	264
1990/91	164	56	129	44	293
1991/92	113	40	168	60	281
1992/93	289	59	204	41	493



**Table 3:** Cost of External Support Provided to FWS, 1984–1994/5 (rs.)

	<b>Total '000 rs.</b>	<b>Per Cent</b>	<b>Per Year<sup>a</sup>'000 rs.</b>	<b>Per Cent</b>	<b>Per Active Member/year<sup>b</sup></b>
<b>External donor agencies</b>					
CEBEMO	4700	70			
Bread for the World	712	11			
Intermediate technology	650	10			
SIFFS	640	10			
Sub-total	6702	100	670	83	571
<b>Indian agencies</b>					
Bad and doubtful debts <sup>c</sup>	895		90	11	
Don Bosco <sup>d</sup>	504		50	6	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8101</b>		<b>810</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>690</b>
In pounds @ £1 = 48 rs.	169				14

<sup>a</sup>From 1984 to 1994/5

<sup>b</sup>Based on 1994 membership of 1174

<sup>c</sup>To 1992/3

<sup>d</sup>Estimate

**Table 4:** Number and Type of People Enjoying Benefits from the FMC/FWS

<b>Types of benefits</b>							
A. Capacity to influence future FWS decision making							
B. Access to saving and consumer credit schemes							
C. Access to credit and new technology							
D. Access to auction facility and improved prices.							
E. Gains from union-inspired legislation regulating catch etc.							
			<b>No. enjoying each benefit type</b>				
Beneficiaries	No.	Per Cent	A	B	C	D	E
<b>FWS Members</b>							
Traditional craft operators	152	7		152		152	152
Individual plyboat owners	117	5	117	117	117	117	117
Join plyboat operators	84	4	84	84	84	84	84
Plyboat crew <sup>a</sup>	834	36		834	834	834	834
Sub-total	1187	51	201	1187	1187	1187	1187
<b>Non Members</b>							
Operating other plyboats	810	35			810	810	810
Operating other craft <sup>b</sup>	293	13					293
Sub-total	1103	49			810	810	1103
<b>Total</b>	<b>2290</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>1187</b>	<b>1845</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2290</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>a</sup>Includes some former owners who may continue to enjoy limited access to benefit A

<sup>b</sup>Also benefit from improved prices, but to a lesser degree than others

**Table 5:** Occupation and Wealth Status

<b>Wealth Categories</b>		<b>Weighting<sup>a</sup></b>			
A. Accumulating assets on a substantial scale		4			
B. Able to achieve modest savings		3			
C. Bare subsistence		2			
D. Below subsistence level		1			
<b>Percentage by Wealth Category</b>					
<b>Primary Occupation</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Total</b>
Gulf worker	86	9	5		100
Individual boat owner	16	39	37	8	100
Small business	31	15	23	31	100
Trawler crew	6	29	59	6	100
Motorboat crew	3	24	60	13	100
Joint boat owner		40	20	40	
Fish vendor			33	67	100
Shore seine crew				100	100
<b>Total</b>	19	24	39	17	100
<b>Weighted Scores</b>					
Gulf worker	344	27	10		381
Individual boat owner	64	117	74	8	263
Small business	124	45	46	31	246
Trawler crew	24	87	118	6	235
Motorboat crew	12	72	120	13	217
Joint boat owner		120	40	40	200
Fish vendor			66	67	133
Shore seine crew				100	100

<sup>a</sup>converts percentage into weighted score

## **NOTE**

1. The Department for International Development (DFID) is the British government department that supports programmes and projects to promote overseas development. It provides funding for social and economic research to inform development policy and practice. DFID funds supported this study. The DFID distributes the report to bring the research to the attention of policy makers and practitioners. However, the views expressed in the document do not reflect the DFID's official policies or practices, but are those of the authors alone. Special thanks are due to Rachel Kumar of the Centre for Management Development for her help in data collection and analysis; to V. Vivekanandan of the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies, and Julian Theele of the Fishermen Welfare Society for sharing with us their knowledge of local fishing conditions; and to Kurien Kattickaran of CEBEMO, and Brian O'Riordan of the Intermediate Technology Development Group for providing detailed comments on an earlier draft.

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