

Global Struggle as the Dispossessed Fight Back

The explosion of shrimp farming in the late 1980s and early 1990s has seen dramatic transformation in the livelihoods of coastal dwellers and rural inhabitants. Desperately concerned about the threat to their lives and livelihoods, rural community people affected by the encroachment of shrimp farmers have struck back at aqua culture owners. From India to Ecuador, shrimp farming has met with significant resistance by local communities to its further expansion. Protests have centered around issues of pollution, takeover of lands, access to water resources, destruction of mangroves, and the deterioration of surrounding soil quality.

Sometimes violent clashes occur, some ending in beatings and even death for some protesters. In one incident in Bangladesh two villagers lost their lives - one of them killed by a bomb attack arranged by shrimp-farm owners. Similarly, in India, a strong grassroots movement has developed where angry communities have organized to prevent the building of shrimp ponds, and have even attacked aqua culture farms. In Honduras, women from local villages have formed human road blocks, placing their bodies in front of intruding bulldozers hired to clear the mangroves for shrimp ponds.

Worldwide efforts are needed to put an end to the destructive environmental and social impacts caused by export-oriented shrimp aqua culture while enforcement of strict regulations to protect the environment and curbs on the destructive expansion of intensive shrimp aqua culture are urgently needed, pressure to curb the rampant expansion of shrimp aqua culture may lie with the market itself.

Many of those who are directly feeling the ecological and social impacts being generated by the spread of shrimp aqua culture speculate that curbing the expansion of this destructive industry will mean curbing the appetite for shrimp in the big consumer markets of Japan, the United States and Europe. "People who enjoy eating shrimp don't know that natural resources are being destroyed to bring it to them. If we explain that the price of the shrimp they're eating is the death of many marine species and even the whole gulf [of Fonseca in Central America], they'll understand that they should oppose the shrimp industry's destructive activities." [Saul Montufar, president of the Honduran Committee to Defend the Flora and Fauna of the Gulf of Fonseca, describing their campaign to raise consumer "awareness" about the environmental damage that goes into providing a plate of shrimp.]

And many people in Third world tropical countries who are directly feeling the ecological and social impacts being generated by the spread of shrimp aqua culture respond to the words of India's Shri Banke Behary Das, who is a member of the Peoples Alliance Against the Shrimp Industry: "I say that those who eat shrimp -- and only the rich people from the industrialized countries eat shrimp -- I say that they are eating at the same time the blood, sweat and livelihood of the poor people of the Third world."