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**Social Security for Fishworkers in Brazil:  
A Case Study of Pará**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), social security implies the protection provided by society to its members (both present and future generations), through public measures, against social and economic deprivation. Such deprivation can originate from loss or reduction of livelihoods, due to specific situations like illness, maternity, labour accidents or occupational hazards, unemployment, disability, old age, and so on.

In Brazil, social security measures first appeared during the Empire, in the 19th century, with the first *montepios*, co-operative institutions established to provide pensions to civil servants and their dependents. Through other periodic measures, Brazil's social welfare system has evolved to include more categories of professions and a broader range of benefits offered. During the decade of the 1930s, as part of the country's industrialization process, social welfare benefits were extended to urban workers in the formal sector of the economy. Only in the 1960s did rural workers get included in such a social welfare system.

The constitutional reformulation of Article 195 in 1988 created the 'special categories' in the social welfare system. Artisanal fishermen, their spouses and children above the age of 16 are classified in the special category. Later, through Law 8.287 of 20 December 1991, the unemployment insurance scheme was created for the artisanal fishermen. Leaders of fishermen's organizations consider these measures 'victories' resulting from their mobilization.

Besides being risky and providing only highly fluctuating yields (and thus incomes) for fishermen and fishing communities, artisanal fisheries is also characterized by the precariousness of equipment and labour conditions prevalent in the sector. Hence the need for social protection measures for fishworkers and their dependents is even more crucial. Yet, prevailing social security systems, especially in developing countries, usually do not take into account fishworkers or, when they do, generally offer only poor and restrained benefits, compared to those accorded to other professional categories, notably those engaged in the formal sector of the economy in urban areas.

This study is meant to understand the current status of the social welfare system available in Brazil for the fisheries sector, from the point of view of democratization of access, the methodologies used and the extent to which demands have been taken into account. Brazil's social welfare system is currently the focus of restructuring programmes by the government, which aim to reduce the growing 'deficits' of the system. Reductions in the scope of benefits can be expected from the ongoing reforms, which is another reason to analyze the functioning and range of the social welfare system in fisheries, particularly for artisanal fishworkers, among the most neglected and marginalized of categories to figure in the system, alongside small agriculturalists, mineral gatherers and indigenous peoples.

This study is divided into eight sections. The first one is a socioeconomic profile of Pará State, northern Brazil. The second section outlines the major characteristics and importance of the fisheries sector in Pará State. The third section traces the evolution of the Brazilian social welfare system, based on specific documentation of legislation, paying particular attention to the status of fishworkers.

The fourth section -- based mainly on interviews with professional leaders, particularly those heading fishermen's *colônias* (local fishermen's professional organizations) and associations -- analyzes the conditions of access to social security benefits and rights.

The fifth section draws on interviews with persons in charge of support organizations, such as Movimento de Pescadores do Pará (MOPEPA, Movement of Fishermen from Pará State), MONAPE (Movimento Nacional dos Pescadores/National Fishermen's Movement) and Conselho Pastoral dos Pescadores (CPP, the Pastoral Fishermen's Council).

The sixth section puts together information provided by technicians from public institutions that operate the social welfare system.

The seventh section analyzes aspects of gender and age, while the final eighth section draws conclusions and offers recommendations.

## **1. PARÁ STATE: SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE**

Located in the northern region of Brazil, Pará is the second largest State in territorial area (1,253,164.5 sq km), representing around 17 per cent of Brazil's territory and 26 per cent of the Brazilian Amazon. It accounts for 562 km of the Atlantic coast and 40 per cent of the interior waters of Brazil, being part of the larger Amazon basin. It is politically divided into 143 towns, distributed in 6 *meso* regions and 22 micro-regions.

The following are some of the important characteristics of Pará State:

- Total population (in 2000): 6,192,307, of which 67 per cent live in urban areas.
- Gender distribution: Men: 51 per cent; Women: 49 per cent.
- Percentage of illiterates above 10 years of age: 16.
- Gross Domestic Product (in 2001) US\$7,500; Per capita annual income: US\$ 1,184.48.
- The economy of the State is based on agriculture, cattle raising, and extraction of natural resources like wood and, in smaller amounts, fish (including shrimp). The State has very large projects for export of minerals, including iron, copper and bauxite, the latter for producing alumina and aluminum. The mineral and wood industries export mainly raw materials and few processed products.
- Most of the agriculture is practised by small-scale units producing crops for internal consumption, with manioc still being one of the most important products, in terms of volume. The federal government's development policies in the Amazon region during the 1970s stimulated the establishment, and subsequent expansion of, large cattle farms. The creation of roads and corporate tax exemption encouraged the industrial

occupation of the southern regions of the State. Conflicts over land soon became frequent, and agrarian reform programmes grew timid.

- Soy plantations in the southeastern part of the State have been expanding, with negative environmental impacts, consequent to their requirement for large areas for cultivation
  - The Human Development Index for the State is 0.723 (in 2000), compared to Brazil's national figure of 0.766, ranking Pará 20th the 27 Brazilian States.
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