

Ahmedabad Statement on Coastal Fisheries and Area Co-management

We, representatives of fishing community organizations from the Veraval-Mangrol region, representatives of fisheries and other departments and institutions of the Government of Gujarat, fisheries scientists and NGO representatives, met in Ahmedabad, Gujarat on 3rd and 4th August 2007, for the “Expert Consultation on Coastal Fisheries and Area Co-management”.

We met to discuss the crisis facing our fisheries and coastal resources, and to find a way forward. We recognized that our fisheries resources, the very basis of our livelihoods, are showing signs of decline due to reasons that include excessive fishing pressure. For this, we recognize that we are jointly responsible.

This consultation is not an event by itself. It is the outcome of a long process of dialogue and discussion with the fishing communities in the Veraval-Mangrol region that started several years ago. As a result, we share trust and good will and a common commitment to move towards better management of our resources.

We recognized also that our fragile and unique coastal areas, the spaces we have inhabited and used for generations, are being polluted and taken over and that coastal resources are being indiscriminately destroyed. This has implications for the health of the fisheries and resource base of our livelihoods.

As men and women representing fishing community organizations and those supporting them, we consider it important to discuss the management of both coastal land and fisheries resources within the same framework. This calls for a new way of looking at development – not only in terms of economic growth but also in terms of well being for all, with a focus on equity and sustainability.

In our view, it is essential to put in place co-management arrangements for the management of coastal and fisheries resources, based on discussion between community organizations and government representative, to build a genuine partnership based on trust. We draw attention to the relevant provisions of the Gujarat Marine Fisheries Act, the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification and the Panchayati Raj Act that recognize the customary rights of the fishing communities to fisheries resources and coastal habitats. We are of the view that these legal instruments can be used to put in place appropriate co-management arrangements.

Achieving co-management calls for a change in the mind set of the representatives of both community and government. A certain amount of preparedness is required for this. It calls for wider awareness on global issues, creative use of tools for participatory processes and human capacity building.

Fishing communities have lived along the coasts for generations, and used coastal areas for repairing nets, berthing boats, drying fish etc. Our communities are now faced with threats of displacements to make way for industrial and other infrastructure development. We consider it essential that priority rights of coastal fishing communities to coastal areas and spaces

traditionally used by them should be recognized and strengthened, including through appropriate legal measures.

While we assert the rights of those traditionally involved in fishing, we recognize the need to be mindful of the rights of those from other communities who work in the fishery sector.

We are aware that rights come with responsibilities and obligations and we are willing to take up our share of the responsibility. We wish to express our commitment to all the above sentiments and values by taking concrete action in the following realms:

- Initiate co-management experiments starting with existing legal instruments
- Initiate a management council of all stakeholders in Mangrol to manage the harbour and fisheries and evolve a co-management framework through this process of learning by doing. The financial and administrative processes of this committee will be transparent.
- The community representation (women and men) in any co-management initiative will be at least 70 percent
- Initiate measures to collect data and information on the fishing operations in a participatory manner in order to assess the health of the fishery.
- Take measures to reserve the coastal land and reassign unused land on a priority basis for fishing community habitation, pre and post harvest activity and social infrastructure. Land presently managed by the GMB and the GIDC but that are unutilised could be earmarked for this purpose.
- Initiate steps for improvement of women's fish market infrastructure starting in Chorwad and the model will be expanded to other regions
- Set up good quality health services in the fishery areas, improve the sanitation facilities for better hygiene and develop ways to manage the waste.
- Start higher education institutions in proximity of fishery areas

We commit ourselves to take this process forward in order to create a more responsible and sustainable fisheries that will contribute to the total well being of coastal communities.