

# Getting Their Act Together

Coastal communities in the Veraval-Mangrol coast of Saurashtra in the Indian State of Gujarat are pushing for fisheries and coastal-area co-management

There has been an interesting sharing of ideas in recent issues of *SAMUDRA Report* on the experiences and principles of co-management. All over the world, fisher communities are trying desperately to safeguard their access to fish resources, while, at the same time, being driven to catch more in order to keep afloat. The fishers of the Saurashtra coast of Gujarat, one of the foremost fish-producing States of India, are no exception, as we happened to realize through a study that we had undertaken on "The Impact of Development on Human Population Dynamics and the Ecosystem" in three locations of the west coast of India, with the help of a grant from the McArthur Foundation.

One of the study locations was the large fishing harbour town of Veraval in Gujarat. The findings of the study were rather revealing, not only regarding the nature of the decline of the over-capitalized trawl fishery, but also the poor environmental and social indicators in a place that had a booming fishery for over 25 years through the 1980s and 1990s. In the community feedback workshops held in 2005, people were also taken aback by the findings of the study for while they were aware that their fishery was on the downswing, they felt challenged to realize that a large number of the children of the community were not in school, that there was a fall in the female sex ratio, and that there was a rise in the levels of morbidity and demands for dowry at marriages. As a community that is basically business-oriented and with a desire to simultaneously claim progress, they found themselves in a prisoner's

dilemma. They threw us the challenge of seeking a way out. By doing so, they were actually inviting us to interact with them on a longer-term basis and, despite the fact that we had no earlier plans of doing so, we accepted to get involved.

The fishery in the area is a trawl fishery along a 40-km coastline between the two fishing harbours of Veraval and Mangrol, which account for a third of the fish catches of Gujarat. There is also a vibrant *hodi* fishery of fiberglass-reinforced plastic (FRP) beach-landing craft, interspersed with the trawlers. We decided to get intensively involved in the fishing harbour/community of Mangrol as the community has traditionally been well organized. We were

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also fortunate to get a local team that the local community agreed to host. In preparation for the work, we organized an intensive training programme for the team. There were also four representatives from Mangrol and Veraval, selected by the community, who participated in the programme. They actually represented the trawl fishery.

## Initiating change

We did not initially mind this fact as it was this sector that we thought had to be involved in initiating any change in resource management. The

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boatowners were intensely involved in the training programme and, during the subsequent period, they turned out to be the main agents of change in the community. Besides developing an analysis of the fisheries crisis, they were most intrigued by the connections made to the fall in the female sex ratio, the number of school-age dropouts, the high morbidity rates, and the extensive

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pollution of water bodies, all in a context where the communities were well organized but totally in the hands of men. The inputs on gender analysis and the patriarchal development paradigm helped them to see the negative side of male-dominated communities, where women have no voice, and, as a consequence, the issues of potable water, sanitation and health receive no priority. In fact, the community organizations had seen to it that entry into the trawl fishery was limited to members of the same caste. Yet just as these caste organizations camouflaged disparities in the community, they were unable to manage the manner in which

investments were made in the fishery, which, in turn, aggravated the growing disparities.

The fishery in the area has been kept afloat by, on the one hand, State subsidies on diesel and, on the other, by the opening up of export markets and the development of *surimi* plants. It is otherwise an extremely inefficiently run trawl fishery, which has also contributed to the massive pollution in the harbours. But the government has gradually begun to be less lenient on the diesel subsidies, certain export consignments have been rejected by some importing countries, and the government has begun giving greater importance to developing coastal resources other than fisheries. The fishing communities, therefore, needed to get their act together and think differently about their fishery and its future if they did continue to consider the fishery as a means of livelihood.

Strategies to tackle this problem were developed at the training programme, and a plan was drawn up to set up a coastal area managing council in a year as well as push for co-management of the fisheries. The first step was to develop a general awareness in the community about the inter-relationships among the ocean, the land and the people so that people understand how these affect one another. This was done at several levels through all kinds of community programmes but the strategy in the first year was to:

- develop a forum for women where they could discuss and understand these issues and, at the same time, create a collective to gradually represent their cause and themselves in the community organization (*samaj*);
- create an awareness among the youth and children about the coast and oceans; and
- widen the understanding of the fishers themselves regarding coastal-area issues, and relate these to their fisheries-management possibilities. For this, efforts were made to also include the elected representatives of the municipality in discussions related to these issues so that they would be taken into consideration in town planning.

CHANDRIKA SHARMA/ICSF



A meeting on coastal and fisheries co-management, held in Veraval, Gujarat

## Statement

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, 3-4 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 goodwill and a common commitment to move towards better management of our resources.

We recognize also that our fragile and unique coastal areas, the spaces we have inhabited and used for generations, are being polluted and taken over, and the coastal resources are being indiscriminately destroyed. This has implications for the health of the fisheries and resource base and 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 representatives, to build a genuine partnership based on trust. We draw attention to the relevant provisions of the Gujarat Marine Fisheries Act (2003), the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification (1991) 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 mindset of the representatives of both community and government. A certain amount of preparedness is required for this. It calls for wider awareness of 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, and so on. Our communities are now faced with threats of displacement to make way for industrial and other infrastructure development. We consider it essential that the 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 co-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 transactions of this committee will be transparent.
- \* Community representation (men and women) in any co-management initiative should be at least 70 per cent.
- \* Initiate measures to collect data and information on 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 activities and social infrastructure. Lands managed at present by the Gujarat Municipal Board (GMB) and the Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation (GIDC), but which are unutilized, could be earmarked for this purpose.
- \* Initiate steps for the improvement of women's fish-market infrastructure, starting in Chorwad and expanding to other regions.
- \* Set up good-quality health services in fishery areas, improve sanitation facilities for better hygiene, and develop ways to manage waste.
- \* Start higher-education institutions in the proximity of fishery areas.

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



Women in the fishing village of Mangrol, Gujarat, India, unloading the day's catch

The most interesting results were from an active group of women fish vendors who pressured the municipality and the fisheries department for a better fish market, while another group made a detailed study of the community's problems relating to water, sanitation and attendant infrastructure, which was presented to the members of the *samaj*. In both these cases, the community's men were very responsive and open to the idea that women could also be part of the co-management process.

The discussions on co-management were done separately for the fishing sectors, the community organizations and the women so that all of them could un-

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derstand the issues and felt free to raise doubts and make suggestions from the point of view of their own sectors. It was clear that there were several areas of conflict.

After the discussions, all the representatives got together to discuss the

possibility of a larger plan and who would finally meet the government and scientists to make the proposed presentation on co-management. Importantly, it was the first time that women and men from various sectors, caste and religious groupings had got together to discuss coastal and fisheries issues.

Between 2 and 3 August 2007, an Expert Consultation on Fisheries and Area Co-management was held in Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujarat, supported by the Fish

Code Programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), where the State's entire fisheries department was present, together with scientists from the Central Marine Fisheries Institute (CMFRI), the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) and the Fisheries Survey of India (FSI), as well as trader, processor and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA).

The community leaders first presented their ideas on co-management, which included both the need for fisheries management and coastal-area management, and articulated why they thought that this was a viable option in their particular context.

They requested the government to create a framework of legislation for co-management, where both their rights to the coastal resources and the responsibilities of the government and the various stakeholders would be clearly defined. Subsequently, the experts responded, and a group discussion followed on the action that could be taken.

An interesting and heated discussion between the trawl-boat owners, the scientists and the government officials had even the women chipping in, but unfortunately the *hodi* owners remained silent.

At the end of the Consultation, a Statement was issued (see box on pg. 27).

The importance of this process has to do with the fact that co-management was proposed by the community representatives from a shore-based fisheries perspective and not a fishing perspective alone. This was possible because of the data available and the focus on the fishery as a means of livelihood that has to be sustained. But this is not an easy process and it still has to be operationalized. We bank on the tremendous amount of goodwill shown by all the stakeholders, which indicates that the stakes in actually managing the fisheries are high. ¶

#### For more



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**A Collaborative Research Project  
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 TOPIC.html  
**Handbook of Fisheries  
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#### Correction

Some errors crept into “The Quota Conundrum” (*SAMUDRA Report* No.47, July 2007), as indicated by the author, Arthur Bogason: On pg. 22, “...while the rest are pelagic species that go for human consumption...” should have read “...the rest are pelagic species, which go more and more for human consumption...” On pg. 24, “...the big seafood companies bought 700 of the 1,043 small boats, transferred the quotas to their trawlers, destroyed the small boats or sold them off, some as leisure craft (to avoid them entering the fisheries again)...” should have been “...the big seafood companies bought 700 of these 1,043 boats, transferred the quotas to their trawlers, destroyed the boats (to avoid them to enter the fisheries again—they could not even be sold as pleasure boats)...” On pg. 25, “Boats using longlines and landing on a daily basis get a 13 per cent reduction of their quotas...” should have been “Boats using longline and landing on daily bases get a 13 per cent lesser reduction from their quotas...” The fish in the photograph on pg. 26 is a spotted catfish, not a cod. Our apologies for the errors.