

Managing to Benefit

A workshop on marine protected areas in India suggested ways to achieve livelihood-sensitive conservation and management of coastal and fisheries resources

A two-day workshop, titled ‘Social Dimensions of Marine Protected Area (MPA) Implementation in India: Do Fishing Communities Benefit?’, was organized by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), from 21-22 January 2009 in Chennai, India. The principal objective of the workshop was to discuss the findings of five case studies undertaken by ICSF on marine and coastal protected areas—on the Gulf of Mannar National Park and Biosphere Reserve, the Malvan (Marine) Wildlife Sanctuary, the Gahirmatha (Marine) Wildlife Sanctuary, the Sundarban Tiger Reserve, and the Gulf of Kutch National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary. Apart from documenting the fishing communities’ perspective on MPAs, the workshop was also meant to be a forum to discuss legal, institutional and other relevant aspects of MPA implementation in India, and to put forward proposals for achieving livelihood-sensitive conservation and management of coastal and fisheries resources.

Over 70 persons—including representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, the Forest Departments of the States of Orissa, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu; the Fisheries Departments of West Bengal and Tamil Nadu the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), environmental groups, fishworker organizations and independent researchers—participated in the workshop. The first of its kind to be organized in India, the workshop was supported by the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB).

Elaborating on marine and coastal protected areas in her introduction to the workshop, Chandrika Sharma, Executive Secretary, ICSF, highlighted that within the Indian context, the term refers to National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries declared in coastal and marine area, under the Wild Life (Protection) Act (WLPA), 1972.

The case studies, she said, highlighted that large numbers of men and women in fishing communities—an estimated 10 per cent of marine fishers in India—are facing loss of livelihoods due to restrictions on fisheries in coastal

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and marine protected areas. Moreover, feelings of victimization and alienation due to the manner in which regulations are implemented are common, while efforts at creating alternative livelihood opportunities have remained limited. Also, there has hardly been any systematic effort to improve access to basic services for enhancing long-term livelihood options.

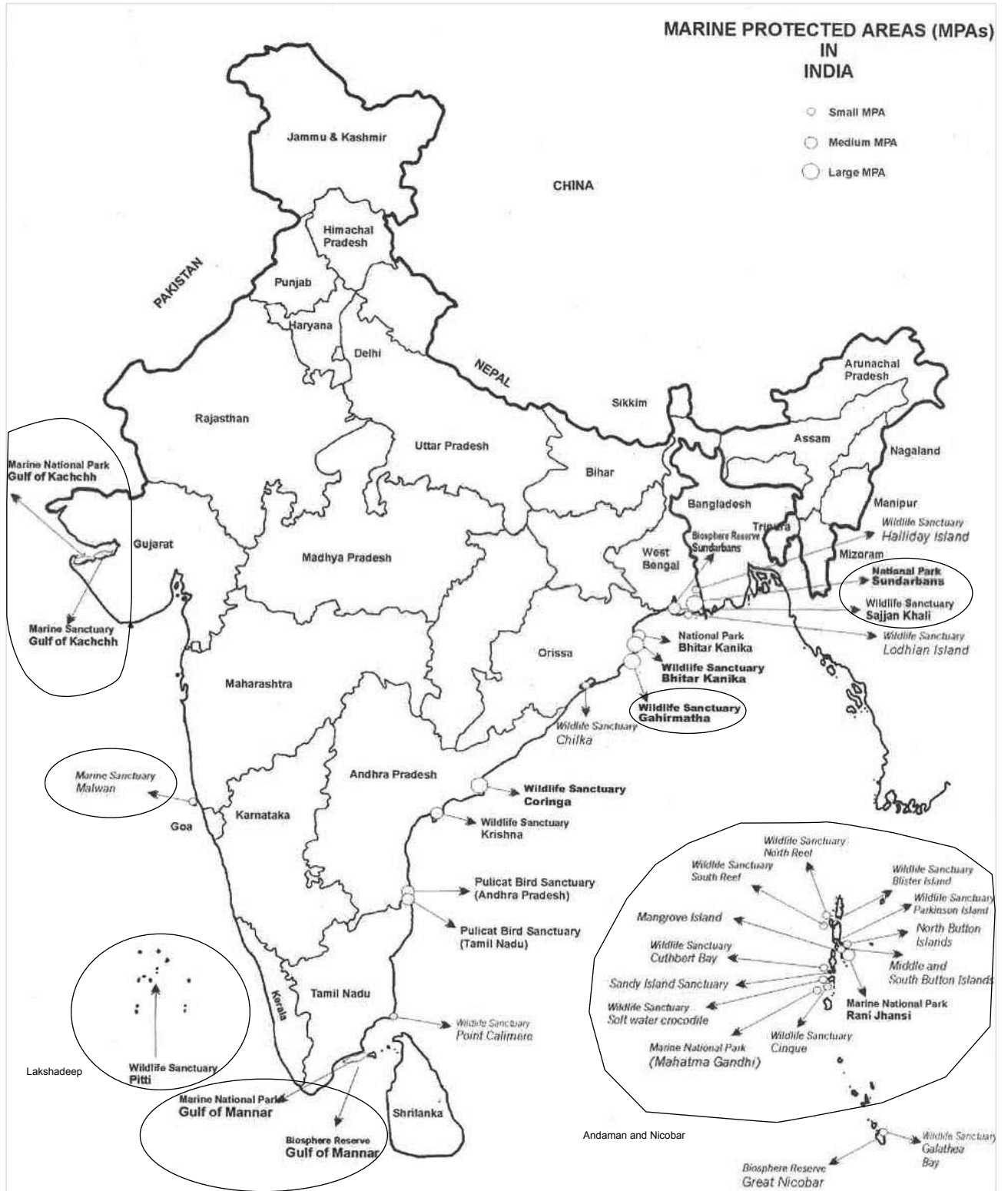
Degradation and pollution

The focus has been mainly on regulating fisheries, while serious issues of degradation and pollution by non-fisheries factors have not been dealt with, which compromises the very objectives for which the protected areas (PAs) were set up. In his opening address to the workshop, M.K.R. Nair, Fisheries Development Commissioner,

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MARINE PROTECTED AREAS (MPAs) IN INDIA

- Small MPA
- Medium MPA
- Large MPA



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Source: Singh, H.S. 2002. Marine Protected Areas in India: Status of Coastal Wetlands and Their Conservation. Ahmedabad, Gujarat Ecological Education and Research Foundation (GEER)

There are 31 marine and coastal protected areas and two biosphere reserves in India

Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (DADF), Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, said that fishers residing along the coastline of India are the traditional owners of the resources in those areas. While there is consensus on the need for environmental restrictions and regulations, the impact of marine and coastal protected areas on fishers who are already below the poverty line, is severe. Nair proposed a system of co-management for PAs that is located within a balanced “seascape” approach.

In their presentation on the Gulf of Mannar National Park and Biosphere Reserve, Ramya Rajagopalan, Consultant, ICSF, and S. Arulanandam, Legal Advisor to the Ramnad District Fishworkers’ Trade Union (RDFTU) highlighted that the designation of the National Park has denied fishers access to the fishing grounds surrounding the 21 islands, where no extractive activity is allowed. This has affected 35,000 active fishers, including 5,000 women seaweed collectors, and 25,000 fishermen who dive for sea cucumbers. Highlighting the socioeconomic problems facing fishing communities, RDFTU has demanded long-term, alternative livelihood options for future generations and short-term alternate livelihood options for the present generation. The union has also demanded that traditional fishers who use non-motorized vessels be allowed to fish near the islands, and that existing community initiatives, including those for regulating seaweed extraction, be recognized.

Pradip Chatterjee of Direct Initiative for Social and Health Action (DISHA) said that the Sundarbans, which has a multiplicity of PA designations—as Tiger Reserve, Wildlife Sanctuary, National Park, Biosphere Reserve and Heritage Site—provides for only non-motorized vessels to fish in the Buffer Area of the Tiger Reserve. Some of the livelihood concerns that fishworkers face arise from the limited number of licences and the complexities involved in their transfer, and the arbitrary imposition of fines for violations. The two fishworker organizations in the area have opposing positions: while



M.K.R. Nair of the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, and Nalini Nayak, Member, ICSF, at the opening session of the workshop

one demands restriction with a human face and a legitimate role for fishers in managing PAs, the other calls for the removal of all restrictions on fishing within the Reserve.

Narayan Halder and Giridhari Giri of the Orissa Traditional Fishworkers’ Union (OTFWU) pointed out that in the Gahirmatha (Marine) Wildlife Sanctuary, nearly 30,000 active fishers are affected by turtle protection measures, 43 per cent of whom are below the poverty line. OTFWU has put forward several proposals to protect

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the fishers’ livelihood interests while simultaneously meeting conservation objectives.

Self-regulation

These include reducing the area of the Sanctuary, particularly of the Core Area; allowing small motorized vessels to fish in the Core Area in a sustainable manner; supporting self-regulation initiatives of fishing communities; and implementing the five-km ‘trawl-free’ zone under the Orissa Marine Fishing Regulation Act (OMFRA). OTFWU has also been demanding the

implementation of provisions in the WLPA (as amended in 2002 and 2006) for protecting innocent passage of fishers and their occupational interests, through clear guidelines and rules. The union has also called for participatory enforcement and monitoring measures to reduce conflicts; scientific studies on turtle mortality; and regulation of other non-fishery-related activities that have an impact on turtle mortality.

In their presentation on the Gulf of Kutch (Marine) National Park and Sanctuary, Nilanjana Biswas, an independent researcher, and Bharat Patel of SETU Information Centre, pointed out how the restrictions in place are affecting the *pagadiya* fishers, who wade into the waters with stake-nets to fish, as well as those using plank-built boats (*hodis*). They expanded on the severe threats confronting the area from industrial activities, especially from the petrochemical industries, oil pipelines passing through the PA, cement and coral mining, fertilizer plants, ports, shipbreaking units and special economic zones (SEZs). They stressed that the current legal regime for PAs is not adequate to address the specific needs of marine protection, especially to combat the threats from the non-fisheries activities taking place adjacent to PAs. Fishworker organizations are, therefore, demanding a comprehensive—not piecemeal—

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approach to the management of the marine environment, which addresses the root causes of habitat destruction and depletion of resources.

Ramesh Dhuri from the Malvan Taluka Shramik Machhimar Sangh said that the Malvan (Marine) Wildlife Sanctuary, designated to protect coral reefs, mangroves and rocky shores, has a fisherfolk population of 9,000. While fishers in Malvan recognize the importance of conservation, it is the lack of consultation and transparency

in the declaration and management of the sanctuary that they are against. At the local level, there is a great deal of resistance to the sanctuary.

One workshop participant questioned the use of the word 'protection' instead of 'conservation', as it does not imply options for the sustainable use of resources. Several participants queried the very rationale for setting up marine and coastal protected areas, noting that there was no clear evidence of their benefits. One participant wondered whether it is a classic 'lose-lose' situation in which thousands lose their livelihoods, even as there is no clear indicator that conservation objectives, such as reduction of turtle mortality, are being met. On the issue of alternative and alternate livelihoods, it was said that these should benefit the local fishers who are worst affected, and should be a way to reduce pressure on fishery resources, not to take away the rights of fishers to the resource. Several participants highlighted the need for gender-segregated socioeconomic data.

Deepak Apte of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) described the initiative by local communities to conserve marine resources in the Lakshadweep islands. A proposal for declaring a Conservation Reserve under the WLPA has met with the approval of local communities. Whether this is the most suitable option and whether it would reduce the role and power of local communities in decisionmaking, and, in effect, hand over management powers to Forest Department officials, is a moot point.

Manish Chandi, Researcher, Andaman and Nicobar Islands Environmental Team (ANET) and Research Affiliate, Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), provided an overview of the coastal and marine protected areas in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Holistic approach

In a session on legal issues, Chandrika Sharma of ICSF drew attention to the need for putting in place a holistic and comprehensive management framework for protecting coastal and marine resources, which addresses



Panel discussion on "The Way Forward" at the end of the ICSF workshop on Social Dimensions of Marine Protected Area Implementation in India

both fishery and non-fishery management concerns, and draws on international and national legal and policy frameworks.

In the fisheries context, there is need to move the focus from production to management, and develop an environmental plan for fisheries. Existing artisanal fishing zones could be seen as one of form of PA, given that they enjoy a higher level of protection than their surroundings, it was pointed out.

Sanjay Upadhyay, Advocate, Supreme Court of India, provided an overview of PA categories under the WLPA. He also drew attention to options, under other legislation, for designating specified areas that could meet both livelihood and conservation objectives. Upadhyay also stressed the need to elaborate, in operational terms, what is meant by the reference in the WLPA to "protect the occupational interests of fishermen". There are also provisions for "innocent passage" that need to be operationalized and applied, to prevent the arrest of those passing

through, but not fishing in, Sanctuary waters, he stressed. Upadhyay further underscored the need for demystified information on various aspects of designating and implementing PAs, which can be understood by lay persons.

Several workshop participants noted that the conflict between conservation and livelihoods is relatively minor—the larger fight is really against environmentally destructive development, particularly in a post-liberalization context. In the absence of the right to say no to destructive development in PAs, talk of 'people's participation' becomes merely ritualistic.

Positive developments

Yet some recent developments have been positive, and spaces for genuine participation by the people have been created. A recent judgement of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, for example, interpreted 'consultation' to mean 'consent', under the Panchayat (Extension to Schedule Areas) Act, 1996.

NEENA KOSHY/ICSF



Member of Parliament and former Minister, Suresh Prabhu, stressed the importance of co-management approaches for the conservation of coastal and marine resources

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In his presentation on the role of fishing community institutions in conserving marine living resources, V. Vivekanandan of the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS) drew attention to several traditional systems and institutions such as the *kadakodi* system of northern Kerala, and the federated structure of governance of the *pattanavars* of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

These communities have, over time, put in place rules to regulate fishing activities and reduce conflicts. In recent years, several new institutional forms have emerged such as the boatowner's associations in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, trade unions, co-operatives, women's self-help groups, and federations and trade associations.

Vivekanandan said that a co-management approach would do well to adopt local traditional structures that are already embedded with social capital. In the absence of a level playing field among the various stakeholders, there is need for caution in propagating co-management, it was pointed out.

The group discussions at the workshop focused on the benefits from marine and coastal protected areas, and how they could be enhanced. All the group presentations highlighted that while some form of protection is needed for coastal and marine resources, on the whole, marine and coastal protected areas have had few

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beneficial impacts, particularly for local communities. All the presentations highlighted the need for community participation, good governance, transparency, accountability, and reliable data. It was suggested that traditional knowledge systems should be integrated with conventional science for PA management, and there is need to regulate non-fishery activities and threats that pose a danger to biodiversity.

In the last session of the workshop, which was a panel discussion on the way forward, B.C. Chowdhury of the Wildlife Institute of India pointed out that management of existing MPAs is weak, and fishers and managers need to get together to review management approaches, and define practical win-win strategies. Establishing marine and coastal protected areas, he said, is not an end in itself; there are other ways in which marine and coastal areas can be protected, which need to be considered. Management plans must be placed in the public domain to ensure greater transparency and accountability.

Harekrishna Debnath of the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF) drew attention to the various struggles of NFF for better management and conservation of resources, stressing the importance of a comprehensive and integrated approach. Conservation efforts should start with regulating the high-impact activities of the larger players in the fisheries and non-fisheries sectors, not the relatively lower-impact activities of the weakest. Since the entire society at large benefits from conservation efforts, the costs of conservation should be borne by all, and not just by fishers; should there be livelihood costs for fishers, they should be fairly compensated, Debnath said.

Kartik Shanker of the Indian Institute of Science and Dakshin Foundation said that it is important to recognize the concept of 'sustainable use', particularly in a marine context, and to adopt frameworks, such as marine conservation areas, rather than PAs, that do not exclude people. The process of setting up marine and coastal protected areas should recognize power differences between stakeholders, he stressed.

Better co-ordination

The importance of conservation is indisputable, said Nalini Nayak, Member, ICSF. The need is to focus on managing ecosystems as a whole, as waters are interlinked, which calls for better co-ordination and collaboration between different departments, ministries, politicians and other stakeholders. A workable

co-management framework needs to be devised, with a substantial representation for women as members of co-management committees, she stressed.


Fisheries Departments should be seen as partners in the marine and coastal protected area management process, said Madhumita Mukherjee, Joint Director of Fisheries, West Bengal State Fisheries Department. Processes for designating PAs must take into account regional and species specificities, she stressed.

Bijoy Ketan Patnaik, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), and Chief Wildlife Warden, Orissa Forest and Environment Department, highlighted the importance of quantifying benefits from PAs, and, using a comprehensive socio-economic database, monitoring changes in fish catches and the incomes of fishing communities in the area. Where it is clear that livelihoods are being negatively affected, adequate compensation should be given to communities, he said. Patnaik also stressed the importance of periodic evaluations of marine and coastal protected areas, to determine whether they were meeting the objectives for which they were set up. Further, consultative processes should be started at the beginning


of any effort to declare a PA, and PA categories such as Conservation Reserves and Community Reserves, which protect the rights of local people and meet conservation objectives, should be explored.

In his concluding address, Suresh Prabhu, Member of

Parliament, and former Minister for Environment, Government of India, reiterated the need for a holistic approach to the conservation of coastal and marine resources. He stressed the importance of co-management approaches that integrate the traditional knowledge of fishers into a model of sustainable conservation.

The consensus Statement finalized by the participants of the workshop (see page 24) highlighted the need to integrate the fundamental principles of participation, environmental and social justice, and human rights in the implementation of marine and coastal protected areas. 

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For more 

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India MPA Workshop Site

www.icsf.net/SU/stmt/C/

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India MPA Case Studies