

# Tap into the Potential

The limitations of India's local self-government institutions can be overcome through capacity building and institutional strengthening

Community participation and the use of technology in disaster response as well as the role of local self-government institutions (LSGI) in fisheries management were the highlights of a two-day workshop on Sea Safety and Fisheries Management in the southern state of Kerala. It was organized jointly by ICSF and the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) on March 1-2, 2023 at Thrissur. Sebastian Mathew of ICSF, emphasized the importance of conservation and sustainable use of fisheries resources, promoting a human rights-based approach in fisheries management. The workshop aimed to foster an understanding of key chapters and concepts related to social development and sustainable development of the SSF Guidelines, he said, calling for a coordinated approach to be

of natural disasters, he said these need to be reconstructed to address specific challenges from climate change. Community participation, he said, was crucial to address the impact of natural disasters, as they often affect local residents who are also first responders.

## A rescue, an idea

Continuing on this theme, Geetha Gopi, former member of the state's legislative assembly, presented an experiential account of the practical benefits of integrating novel technological advancements in the realm of maritime security within her constituency. On January 5, 2021, four fishermen from Naatika village went missing during a routine fishing expedition. Devang Subil, an engineering student and drone pilot, was roped in to develop a specialized search and rescue plan. Using a high-resolution drone camera equipped with GPS tracking, Devang conducted an aerial search and located the missing fishermen at sea. This guided a successful rescue operation. The incident underscored the importance of technology, youth engagement, and innovation in addressing challenges faced by vulnerable communities.

In her presentation, Shibina Elayi, a research scholar at the Central University of Kerala, examined the social and economic conditions of fishworkers in Kerala, including their livelihoods and income, in the context of fluctuations in the fish market. She also investigated the policy measures and programmes implemented by LSGIs to protect the economic and social well-being of fishworkers and reduce social inequality.

Sajeevan Moosamikandy of the Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences (KUFOS) spoke of the role and duties of LSGIs in enhancing safety at sea and regulating illegal,

implemented for integrated coastal protection and fisheries management involving local self-government institutions (LSGI). In attendance were representatives of a range of LSGIs, trade unions, cooperative self-help groups and related social organisations, apart from academics and practitioners.

In the past, Kerala relied on tapioca and sardines as a source of carbohydrates and protein, respectively. But climate change had led to fluctuations in temperature and rainfall, affecting the availability of sardines, said Joy Elamon, director general KILA. While institutions in Kerala had developed plans for adaptation to and mitigation

The potential for collaborative efforts and partnerships in addressing climate change impacts and disaster management measures were also discussed...

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unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. He said that fishworkers in small vessels, particularly in territorial waters, were associated with significant risks and hazards. However, data on small-scale fisheries (SSF) and the individuals engaged in these activities were often limited, with only the names of boat owners known and little information about the fishers on board. This lack of information makes it challenging to understand their work and risks, delaying the implementation of effective marine protection measures and timely intervention in case of emergencies. He said that the involvement of local governments and community-based organizations could facilitate data collection, emphasizing that active participation, cooperation, vigilance and accuracy in data collection were critical for obtaining reliable information. To address illegal practices in fisheries like catching juveniles, there's a need for proactive measures such as establishing effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms and implementing regulations to discourage unregulated fishing.

### **The challenges**

Insights into the current system, services, and challenges encountered by various departments and LSGIs in the areas of sea safety, fisheries management, and social development of fisherfolk communities came from P. Anish from the fisheries department. He elaborated on the existing system and services while highlighting the challenges faced by these entities in effectively addressing the needs of fisherfolk communities and ensuring their social development. He explained that the state's fisheries department was responsible for various activities in the marine fisheries sector, including registration of fisherfolk and fishing boats, disaster management, resettlement and conservation of fish stocks. Other tasks included implementing awareness programmes, enforcing laws and regulations and operating fish-landing centres and harbours.

The department also engaged in activities to protect marine life and provided 24x7 master control room services. Anish said the government

had notified use of mandatory personal protective equipment and security devices for individual safety and protection. The list of equipment for each type of craft was available and if not provided as per the regulations, many small boats might not be eligible for a licence. He said the establishment of Fisheries Management Councils was on-going, headed by the chairperson of the village LSGI or the president of the municipality. These councils include councillors from municipal areas. It was essential that they get cooperation from organizations such as cooperative societies, trade unions and fishworkers' associations. Through proactive measures and stakeholder engagement, these councils aimed to promote sustainable and profitable fisheries while addressing challenges related to resource conservation and the livelihoods of fisherfolk, he said.

The safety of fishermen at sea, particularly those using large mechanized craft, was of paramount importance in the international maritime domain, said John Swamy, former merchant navy navigation officer, who had conducted studies as well as training programmes for fishermen in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Heavy mechanized craft were used, and there were guidelines for the safety measures to be employed for the protection of human life on such vessels. However, it was worth mentioning that these guidelines might not be applicable or followed strictly in the case of small-scale craft. Typically, fishers acquire knowledge and expertise in safety practices through experience, ranging from early age to maturity. Along with a lack of proper facilities for safety measures on small boats, the absence of suitable infrastructure posed a significant challenge in ensuring safety, he said.

### **Lessons from other programmes**

The successful implementation of several specific components of tribal sub-plans (TSP) had facilitated the access of tribal communities to basic infrastructure, including clean water and electricity, which had been instrumental in improving their socioeconomic conditions, said Rajesh K. of KILA. However, reasons

for lack of similar initiatives for the fishing community were unclear. He said Kerala's fisheries sector did not receive a proportional allocation of plan funds based on population; that there was a lack of meaningful participation in policy making from the fisheries sector. Reorganizing and providing legal recognition to facilitate better participation was essential with emphasis on the discussion about the rights of the sea and the coast. Local learning centres and residential schools for fishing communities needed to be established in the manner similar to that of tribal communities.

One point got emphasized over and over: managing the coastal fisheries sector required a comprehensive understanding of the local context and the stakeholders. C. Ramachandran from the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) said that fisheries management concepts originated in cold-water marine regions of western countries; they hence focus on regulating and controlling fish populations to ensure sustainability. However, this approach might not be

**Knowledge and expertise in safety practices are typically acquired by fishers through experience, from an early age**

applicable in the tropical region of Kerala due to differences in local social structures, traditional practices and unique coastal ecosystems. On the other hand, fisheries management in this region should consider and integrate local social, economic and ecological factors for effective conservation and sustainable use of fish resources.

Mathew A.K., described the experiences of Theeramythri programme on alternate livelihoods meant only for women in families of the fishing community, specifically to build business enterprises of women aged between 18 to 55 years. After identifying the women, training and technical help for new initiatives were given. A dedicated group was involved in this programme. The main businesses were

tailoring units, provision stores, snacks units, flour mills, beauty parlours and dry fish sales.

### Recommendations

The final component of the workshop was a group discussion where participants were divided into three groups and asked to deliberate over four questions looking at the role of LSGIs with respect to fishing communities. The workshop's recommendations are as follows:

- \* Introduce a sub-plan exclusively for fishing communities of each LSGI of Kerala with a minimum population of 50 families. Budget allocation can be made following the number of families and region-specific needs and issues.
- \* Make plan guidelines more flexible and specific, indicating the potential activities that can be undertaken in formulating budget allocations to ensure sea safety, welfare and quality of life of fishing communities along the Kerala coastline.
- \* Follow patterns of tribal sub-plan under the 14th Five Year Plan in administering a sub-plan to benefit fishing communities.
- \* Make provisions for sea safety, coastal, marine and inland water disaster preparedness and response related to fishing, social development of fish workers, and develop common facilities for fishworkers' livelihoods development programmes as mandatory components within sub-plans.
- \* Strengthen local Institutional mechanism of fishing communities. For example, the
- \* Expand the network of fisheries inspectors.
- \* Develop a system for programme integration.
- \* Provide compensation for lost workdays due to adverse weather conditions, as notified by the government, and introduce parametric insurance through LSGIs.
- \* Introduce and operationalize through LSGIs a vessel monitoring system for fishing vessels to improve sea safety. For example, a QR-code or a punching-based system.





A Group photo. The workshop emphasized the need for continued development of the mechanisms of local self-governance to address similar issues

- \* Develop regional disaster management plans with LSGI participation and train Emergency Response Team (ERT) members, providing them with appropriate training and capacity building through institutions like the Kerala State Disaster Management Agency (KSDMA). The ERT should be trained in search and rescue techniques and operations, including the use of drones, and equipped to provide emergency medical assistance. LSGIs can provide the necessary resources for this team, such as life jackets, fuel and first aid kits.
- \* Develop a sea safety protocol at the local level, with the participation of local communities. Financial resources can be pooled through government and non-government institutions for developing such protocols.
- \* Establish Marine *Haritha Karma Sena* with the participation of the fishing communities to effectively address the issue of marine litter. The operation of recycling plastic units and generation of user fees can help meet costs associated with the removal of marine litter.
- \* Encourage LSGIs to cooperate with the fisheries department to enforce fishing regulations to prevent overfishing, protect stocks and to promote safety of fishing operations. This can include setting limits on the size and number of fish that can be caught, enforcing closed seasons, prohibiting destructive fishing practices, restricting fishing during extreme climate events, monitoring the movement of fishing vessels, and coordinating search and rescue missions with the participation of fishers.
- \* Assist LSGIs to build the capacity of local fishing communities and other stakeholders in fisheries management through training programmes. This can help ensure that local communities have the knowledge and skills they need to participate in sustainable fisheries management.
- \* Equip KILA to set up a centre to promote development planning of fishing communities and to support the LSGI when they prepare their plans.

#### For more



#### Workshop on Sea Safety and Fisheries Management: Training and Capacity Development of Local Self-Governments, 01-02 March 2023, Kerala, India

<https://www.icsf.net/resources/lsg-workshop-icsf-kila-kerala-india/>

#### Report of the Workshop on Sea Safety and Fisheries Management: Training and Capacity Development of Local Self-Governments, 01-02 March 2023, Thrissur, Kerala

<https://www.icsf.net/resources/report-of-the-workshop-on-sea-safety-and-fisheries-management-training-and-capacity-development-of-local-self-governments-01-02-march-2023-thrissur-kerala/>