



# Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project



## Report on the dissemination workshops of FAO Voluntary Guidelines on Small-scale Fisheries

January-February 2015 • Kakinada • Bhubaneswar • Kuttuili • Kolkata • Chennai • Ramnad

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**ICSF-BOBLME**

**Dissemination of FAO Voluntary Guidelines on Small-scale Fisheries**

**INDIA**

**BACKGROUND PAPER BASED ON SIX SUB-NATIONAL LEVEL CONSULTATIONS ON  
EAST COAST OF INDIA**

**JANUARY- FEBRUARY 2015**

**Implementing the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the  
Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines)**

**Perspectives of the fishers and fishworkers on the east coast of India**

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VENKATESH SALAGRAMA

## Abbreviations

AP	Andhra Pradesh
BOBLME	FAO Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystems Programme
CCRF	Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries
CRZ	Coastal Regulation Zone (Notification)
CSO	Civil society organization
DOF	Department of Fisheries
EAF	Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FWO	Fishworker organization
HP	Horsepower
ICSF	International Collective in Support of Fishworkers
MFRA	Marine Fishing Regulation Act
MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
MPEDA	Marine Products Export Development Authority
NFDC	National Fisheries Development Corporation
OAL	Overall length
SHG	Self-help group
SSF	Small-scale fisheries

## **Implementing the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines)**

### *Perspectives of the fishers and fishworkers on the east coast of India*

#### **A. Introduction**

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) were endorsed by the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) at its 31st Session in Rome in June 2014. These Guidelines have been developed to complement FAO's 1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF).

Towards promoting ownership of the SSF Guidelines by fisheries organizations at national and sub-national levels, the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) has organised six fishworker consultations covering the five eastern coastal states of India (West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry) during January-February 2015 with support from the FAO-Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystems (BOBLME) programme. Integrated Coastal Management (ICM), a development consultancy with considerable experience of working on small-scale fisheries livelihoods and social development issues, implemented the fishworkers' consultations with assistance from local organisations working with fishers and related issues in each state.

These consultations had the following objectives:

- To introduce SSF Guidelines to the fishers, fishworkers and the relevant government and CSO actors in the sector;
- To identify the key categories of SSF actors in each state, with special focus on the vulnerable and marginalised groups to be considered in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines;
- To contextualise the SSF Guidelines in each state from the participants' perspective, covering the livelihood context, poverty, food security and human development issues;
- To discuss the existing policy-institutional issues relating to the implementation of the SSF Guidelines; and
- To discuss and identify options for effective implementation of the SSF Guidelines

These consultations form the basis of this overview paper which provides a summary of issues relating to the livelihoods and the social development dimensions of small-scale fisheries on the east coast of India, structured around the principles of the SSF Guidelines to inform their implementation. In the immediate future, this overview paper is intended to serve as a background document for the proposed *ICSF-BOBLME Subnational Workshop: Implementing the FAO SSF Guidelines, India (East Coast)*, to be held in Chennai on 6-7 March 2015. In the longer term, the processes and their outputs are together intended to guide actions in developing appropriate and effective strategies for implementing the SSF Guidelines.

## **B. Methodology**

Although the SSF Guidelines cover both marine and inland fisheries, the consultative process - and consequently this overview paper - is focused on the marine capture fisheries, except in West Bengal, where representatives included both inland fisheries and (in the Sundarbans context) subsistence aquaculture. This was owing to the need to avoid complicating the agenda with too many diverse themes. The methodology of the consultative process, which took the form of two-day consultations in each state (condensed into one day in Tamil Nadu for logistical reasons), included brief presentations on the SSF Guidelines, followed by more intensive group discussions and panel presentations covering the identification of small-scale fisheries actors, the livelihood and social development context in each state, and the policy-institutional analysis for implementing the SSF Guidelines. The structure of the consultations is given in Annexure 1.

All relevant background material for the consultation was translated into local languages and distributed to the participants prior to the consultation in order to facilitate more effective participation. Given the diversity of the themes that the SSF Guidelines covers - and the wide ranging interpretations that these themes lend themselves to - it was felt necessary to develop a questionnaire in order to help focus the participants' attention on the more important issues during the group discussions. The questionnaire, provided in Annexure 2, was field tested twice in Andhra Pradesh (AP), translated into local languages and distributed to the participants beforehand. The proceedings of the consultations were undertaken entirely in the local languages.

It needs to be mentioned that the consultative processes and the outputs that came out of them have been developed with the clear recognition that this is only the beginning of a long and challenging process of engagement with different actors at the global, regional, national, sub-national levels, as well as with the fishworkers' organisations (FWOs) and the fishworkers themselves. The attempt was not so much to come up with full-fledged answers to the several critical issues that need to be resolved in implementing the SSF Guidelines as it was to initiate a process of introspection that aims to find the right questions to ask and to re-visit the current thinking on the various issues for their relevance and applicability from the perspective both of the SSF Guidelines as well as that of the small-scale fishers on the east coast of India. The recommendations arising out of the fishworkers' consultations will thus need to be taken as provisional first steps that require further refinement and development into actionable strategies.

Further, it is also necessary to keep in mind that the state-level consultations had a short timeframe - effectively spanning one working day - which was unavoidable not only for logistical reasons but also for the convenience of the fishworkers, because care was needed to see that they were able to attend the consultation without losing many working days. The agenda for the consultation was arguably rather ambitious, which meant that long discussions and clarifications were not always possible. What this required, while drafting this report, was to add a little extra detail to contextualise the discussions and their outputs into the broader SSF context to which they applied. During the consultative process itself, the short timeframes as well as the diversity of participants had made it unavoidable that some issues were discussed in more detail than the others at each consultation, which perhaps was a good thing in so far as each component of the SSF Guidelines could be discussed at length in at least one consultation. Thus, the

Kultali (Sundarbans-West Bengal) consultation devoted some time to discuss vulnerability and marginalisation; the Kolkata consultation, which a number of representatives of fishworker organisations attended, the issue of defining and identifying key small-scale fisheries actors, alongside the issue of fishing conflicts, were discussed more; in Odisha, the conservation and management issues took precedence; in Andhra Pradesh, the relevance of the five thematic components of Part II of the SSF Guidelines - and especially the customary tenure and governance issues - were thrashed out in good detail; in Chennai, the CSO perspectives on the implementation of the SSF guidelines was discussed; and in Ramnad, the policy-institutional issues and cross-border issues received more attention. The limited scope of the consultations also meant that certain regions (especially Puducherry) and issues may not have received adequate attention.

### **C. Who are the small-scale fishers on the east coast of India?**

This section discusses three interrelated components relating to defining and identifying the small-scale fisheries actors (SSF actors) on the east coast of India. The first describes the outcome of a tentative effort made in the consultative process to define, from the fishworker participants' perspective, what 'small-scale fisheries' and 'small-scale fishworkers' mean on the east coast fisheries of India. The second component gives a brief summary of the major groups of SSF actors in the five state fisheries. And the final component discusses, at some length, the issues of vulnerability and marginalisation in the small-scale fisheries on the east coast of India and identifies some broad categories of actors who are among the more vulnerable and marginalised sections of SSF and who need specific emphasis in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

#### *How to define small-scale fishers on the east coast of India?*

The SSF Guidelines recognise the great diversity that characterises the small-scale fisheries sub-sector around the world and do not prescribe a standard definition of small-scale fisheries or fishworkers, preferring to leave the responsibility with the implementing agencies (regional, subregional and national) and according to the particular context in which the SSF guidelines are to be applied. They do however emphasize the need to ensure that such identification and application are guided by meaningful and substantive participatory, consultative, multilevel and objective-oriented processes where the voices of both men and women are heard.

As a tentative first step in this direction, the consultative process aimed to discuss the participants' perceptions about how to go about defining 'small-scale fishers and fishworkers'. This is felt important because, according to some understandings, most (if not all) Indian fisheries are small-scale fisheries and hence need support as SSF. Without an appropriate working definition of small-scale fishworkers, there is a real possibility that any efforts to promote small-scale fisheries - such as through the implementation of the SSF Guidelines - could play in the favour of those categories (such as mechanised trawler operators) who are not only *not* small-scale, but who are even a part of the problem that the small-scale fishers are confronted with.

First, an attempt was made to define small-scale fisheries, and the discussions in this regard ranged far and wide, focusing mostly aspects of fishing at sea. The different yardsticks proposed for defining

small-scale fisheries included: ethnic origins of people involved in fishing; dimensions of the fishing craft and the material used to build them; fishing gear used; the depth of fishing ground and distance from the shore; the nature of fish landing sites (open beaches/jetties/harbours); markets catered to and the immediate buyers of the fish; nature of recruiting crew and their payments (sharing/salaries); and investments and returns from fishing. The important conclusion from these, frequently heated, discussions is that, for each of these criteria, the participants often found exceptions that made them less than acceptable. Given that their only point of reference for comparison is the mechanised trawlers (mostly averaging 14mt OAL), which are not that different from the nearest small-scale boats and are crewed by the small-scale fishers themselves, it is perhaps easier to define 'small-scale fisheries' as everyone in the sector except the mechanised vessels above a certain engine horsepower. Another, perhaps more appropriate, definition suggested for small-scale fisheries included all those activities that are 'environmentally sustainable and socially equitable'.

The difficulties in defining small-scale fisheries aside, there was some consensus on the definition of the small-scale fishers and fishworkers. One broad definition - first developed in the Andhra Pradesh consultation, then revised and refined through the Odisha and the West Bengal consultations - went as follows:

*Small-scale fishers and fishworkers are those who, by origin or by occupation, are **directly** involved in the production of fish and other fishery resources, fish processing, fish trade and ancillary activities as their major [or important] source of livelihood.*

The 'direct' involvement in the specific fisheries activities is suggested as a way of excluding the shore-based owners/managers/investors in fishing, while at the same time making space for all actors along the value chains as well as the fishing crew on mechanised fishing fleets and the workers in the seafood processing industries. It has been suggested that the word '*major* source of livelihood' used in the suggested definition above be changed to '*important* source of livelihood' in order to make space for the occasional, part-time and seasonal fishers who constitute the small-scale fishers as per the SSF Guidelines. Additional criteria, such as income earned and current standards of living, have been suggested to further refine the definition but it is felt best to leave this definition for future discussion and refinement.

*Who are the important small-scale fisheries actors on the east coast of India?*

Traditionally, the marine small-scale fisheries of the east coast of India have always retained a strong focus on livelihoods, which meant that - notwithstanding frequent forays into commercial operations, catering to the urban/export trade - the overall emphasis has been on ensuring livelihood stability in the face of relatively small surpluses that fishing generated. This has also meant accommodating a fairly large proportion of people - many of them poor - at all levels in the value chain. This livelihood-focus applies equally well to mechanised operations, which do see adaptations that regularly hover between basic income focused and export-led commercial operations.

Consequently, there are a large number of categories of people who can be considered as major actors in the small-scale sector<sup>1</sup>. While it is neither possible nor practical to provide a comprehensive list of all SSF actors on the east coast of India as obtained from the consultations, the following gives a dozen important SSF categories that can specifically be identified as ‘small-scale’:

*Among the fishers:*

1. Non-motorised vessel operators and fishers
2. Fishers with no vessel, involved in a variety of fishing operations (including by hand and by foot) from the shore, in the near-shore waters, and in the backwaters
3. Motorised vessel owners of a 'limited' engine capacity, which is determined in different places as having less than 2-cylinders or 10HP.
4. Fishers, including internal migrants working on all varieties of fishing crafts - including mechanised vessels.
5. Women who (by themselves or along with their family members) undertake fishing, using basic fishing gears or their hands and feet for collection of fish, crabs, shells, seaweed, shrimp and fish seed etc.
6. Estuarine/backwater/riverine/bay/lake capture fishers

*Among the shore-based fishworkers:*

7. Traditional fish processors and their assistants (excluding large-scale operators/companies characterised by: large investments (the term ‘large’ to be defined on the local context in different states, employment of sizeable labour force, wholesale trade, assured transport systems and distant market supplies)
8. Net-makers and -menders in West Bengal and northern Odisha
9. Women fresh fish sellers
10. Bicycle fish vendors
11. Women working in export processing factories
12. Ancillary workers at the landing sites - fish transporters, sorters and packers, ice crushers and sellers,

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<sup>1</sup> As indicated, the only categories of people who do not fit the definition of ‘small-scale fishers’ on the east coast of India may well be the mechanised boat owners although, even here, we have the example of the Visakhapatnam and the Paradeep mechanised vessel owners’ associations who insist on their ‘small-scale’ credentials, based on caste and other affiliations.

basket weavers and sellers, transport vehicle drivers, etc.

*Vulnerable and marginalised groups in the small-scale fisheries on the east coast of India*

The SSF Guidelines repeatedly emphasise the need to pay special attention to the needs of the vulnerable and marginalized groups among the small-scale fishing communities. While it is true that there are certain groups of people who - by virtue of their occupational status, gender, age, ethnicity, physical and social accessibility, disasters and other natural phenomena - may have conventionally been placed into this category, the participants at the consultations frequently opined that the entire small-scale fisheries subsector - including all actors in it - is becoming increasingly vulnerable and marginalised itself.

The small-scale fishing communities of the Sundarbans are a prime example of a vulnerable and marginalised group. Spread out over a large number of islands in the mangrove swamps of the Sundarbans, their access to basic facilities and services - health, sanitation, education, electricity, drinking water, transport and communications, infrastructure, housing - remains extremely low. Decades of state neglect - at least partly intentional - has led these largely isolated communities to lag behind in terms of most social development indicators. This is aggravated by natural disasters like seasonal floods and annual cyclones, other riverine phenomena (both natural and manmade) like erosion and siltation, shifting river courses and moving islands, and the creeping effects of climate change. Further, the fishers' access to fisheries is curtailed by the forest and wildlife conservation programmes, which include not only prohibitions on fishing in large patches of the Sundarbans but also forced evacuation from islands (Morichjhanpi, Jambudwip) that they have used regularly. The boundary issues with Bangladesh, together with the growing concerns about terrorism, make the area also increasingly security-ridden, laying another layer of pressure on the fishers. The conditions are getting worse, forcing the people to move out in search of other occupations, but their poor skills and knowledge make them good only for unskilled, low-paying, and frequently risky jobs in distant areas and in an intensely alien social and cultural context. All in all, the fishers of the Sundarbans are, without exception, a vulnerable and marginalised lot.

On the other end of the east coast of India are the fishers and the fishworkers of Rameswaram and the Palk Bay. By any social development standard, the fishing communities here are in a much better position when compared to those of the Sundarbans: there are good roads, electricity is available in all villages and access to healthcare and schools is as good as one can expect in the fisheries sector. Their housing is no worse than in the neighbouring communities and their access to markets - both urban and export - is good. The earnings from fishing are reasonably good to attract people from other communities into fishing. The government's development programmes do reach the communities and they are fairly well-versed in the decision-making processes affecting their life and livelihoods. Their issues and concerns do get aired adequately enough to draw national attention and, often, some action to address their concerns.

However, superficial differences aside, in terms of vulnerability, there is probably not much to choose between the fishers of the Sundarbans and those of the Palk Bay. In the Sundarbans, while the standards of living and of social development are extremely weak, the fishers have access to a range of natural resources that - while not necessarily providing very well - do at least take care of their basic subsistence needs. In the southern parts of the Palk Bay and on Rameswaram Island, the fishers' quality-of-life and

social development standards may be better, but their livelihoods are extremely fragile owing to the lack of sustainable alternatives in the area and to the enormous pressure that the fisheries-based livelihoods are already subject to. If there are new entrants into fisheries, their entry owes to the fact that they have few other options. And when the fishers of Rameswaram continue to cross the international boundary line into Sri Lanka for fishing, as one fisher-leader pointed out, it is not always out of ignorance or for the huge catches that can be obtained there, but because they have no alternative to risking their lives and fishing assets on a daily basis. That the Palk Bay fishers are not marginalised from the political processes governing their life and livelihoods is a major difference from the Sundarbans fishers, but the fact is that this support cannot always be taken for granted and also doesn't really go far enough to reduce their vulnerability in the long run.

The increasing levels of vulnerability in Tamil Nadu fisheries are reflected elsewhere too. In Andhra Pradesh, the new coastal and marine development initiatives - power plants, SEZs, pharmaceutical hubs, oil exploration, refineries and shipping ports - are promoted ignoring the prior existence and the interests of the small-scale fishing communities all along the coast. Already, people in some areas like Gangavaram near Visakhapatnam had been dislocated once from their village in order to make way for a new port and, once they had exhausted the scant compensation package provided, the ex-fishers and fishworkers found themselves at a loss and with few employment prospects in sight. With the port in the process of expanding its operations, and several new ports already being envisaged along the coast, the alienation of the fishers from the coastal areas in AP is likely to intensify in the coming years.

In Odisha, the fishers are subject both to development and conservation activities that effectively curtail their access to a large chunk of the coastal and marine fisheries. In Jagatsinghpur, the creeks of the Mahanadi where the fishers berthed their craft and also made a living from fishing have become inaccessible, polluted or clogged up, owing to new industrial initiatives in Paradeep. In Bhadrak district, the fishers are hemmed in between conservation efforts on the one hand and new developments like the Dhamra Port on the other. In Puducherry, the increasing levels of erosion of the coast are reported to be a threat not only to the fishing activities but also to the fishers' habitations along the coast, and the processes are only intensifying with the construction of more breakwaters.

The point is that, in terms of vulnerability and marginalisation, all coastal and marine small-scale fishers are probably in need of increased attention. With the fishers' access to, and dependence on, the fishing grounds, fish landing sites, beaches and even their habitations constantly under threat, their ability to develop sustainable and equitable livelihoods is ever in doubt and that does affect their ability to take more energetic measures towards responsible fisheries management. We'll return to this in the next section.

With new challenges, the existing groups of vulnerable and marginalised people have become even more so. That the fishers go into offshore waters in a flimsy fishing vessel with a temperamental engine to risk natural disasters like cyclones and tsunamis is almost a cliché, but this image has only got bigger now: the fishers go much farther out than ever before and with vessels that are - if possible - even flimsier than the ones they used. There are several people in West Bengal who were attacked by the tigers or crocodiles, but who - or whose families - seldom receive compensation. People involved in potentially destructive

activities like shrimp-seed collection, or undertaking hazardous fishing (as crossing the borders into Sri Lanka), are suggested to be doing so because of lack of alternatives and/or skills to meet the requirements of new opportunities and hence the more vulnerable and extremely marginalised.

The large numbers of ancillary workers in the sector - people involved in various shore-based activities that are critical to the fishing economy - are all but invisible in the policy processes in spite of the fact that the impact of fish declines, fishing bans and other constraints in the sector hit them equally hard, but their ability to receive any support is extremely weak, with even the fishing communities not frequently inclined to share any financial benefit with these 'outsiders'.

The older persons in the fishing communities - and anyone aged above 50 is an older person by the communities' reckoning - are increasingly without any social support, either formal or informal. Families have gone nuclear and the social norms that dictated that the children look after their older parents got weaker, possibly owing to the children's frequent inability to feed their own families adequately.

Yet another major group of vulnerable and marginalised is the growing numbers of internal migrants in small-scale fisheries; these are the inter-state migrants, moving from West Bengal to Tamil Nadu; from Odisha and Andhra Pradesh to Gujarat and Maharashtra; from Tamil Nadu to Kerala; and so on. As we shall discuss, the internal migrants' condition in fisheries is one of denial of basic human rights and labour standards, while the implications of migration on the families of the migrants are equally severe. Another set of perpetual 'outsiders' are the Bangladesh migrants into the Sundarbans and in the northern Odisha fisheries, who - despite having been resident in these areas for several generations now - are still not integrated into the local systems and processes.

Last, but not least, are the women in fisheries, especially single women. In Coringa panchayat in Andhra Pradesh, it is reported in the consultation that, of the 37 fisherwomen who receive widow pensions, as many as 30 are under 30 years of age. One does not know how so many young women came to be widows but the fact remains that in many fishing villages, the proportion of widows and single-women headed households is quite high. Alongside, as one woman from Srikakulam district suggested, there are a number of women who can be considered as widows for all practical purposes; with their husbands spending 10 months in a year in a distant Gujarat, the woman can't but live the life of a widow. The implications of this widowhood - either real or implied - remain serious but little understood, except to suggest that these women are - with very few exceptions - utterly vulnerable and marginalised even within the communities.

To summarise, there are strong indications that all small-scale fishers and fishworkers along the east coast of India are facing increasing levels of vulnerability and marginalisation relating to their life and livelihoods. At the same time, the implications of the various changes within and beyond the subsector for those who have always been vulnerable and marginalised are to further weaken their conditions and reduce their - and the communities' - capacity to cope with the challenges. The existing level of policy responses - as we shall see - is not only inadequate, but is actually declining owing to the policies of liberalisation that demand a reduction in the (already meagre) social protection programmes on the one hand and place an emphasis on coastal 'developments' for better economic gains at the expense of the

small-scale fishing communities and their livelihoods on the other. To prioritise the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in the small-scale fisheries on the east coast of India will require more in-depth work in the coming period.

#### **D. SSF livelihood and social development context from the perspective of the SSF Guidelines**

This section discusses the livelihood context and the social development issues on the east coast of India, using the five main thematic areas of the SSF Guidelines as a framework for the discussion. Obviously, in the very complex, dynamic and diverse social, cultural, economic and environmental ecosystems that characterise the coastal/marine fisheries along the nearly 2600km eastern coastline of India, any attempt to make generalisations applicable along the coast is bound to be difficult, but an attempt will be made here to identify themes and issues that are relevant across the states while also ensuring that the local specificities are not overlooked or ignored in favour of broad generalisations. The presentations based on each state consultation, to be made in one of the sessions at the ICSF-BOBLME Subnational Workshop in March 2015, will provide a more state-specific context for the important issues.

##### ***1. Governance of tenure in small-scale fisheries and resource management***

This thematic area of the SSF Guidelines consists of two further subcomponents: (i) Secure tenure rights for small-scale fishing communities to the fishery resources, fishing grounds, and on land and (ii) Responsible management of fisheries and ecosystems. Prior to discussing the customary rights of tenure in the eastern coastal states of India and their implications, it is necessary to discuss a few concerns that arose in this context from the consultative process.

Firstly, an important concern relates to the language itself: all development workers operating in a different cultural-linguistic context have occasion to recognise the difficulties in communicating the specific meaning of a word or a concept across another language, which is itself reflective of a particular cultural context. The translators involved in the process of translating the SSF Guidelines into the local languages highlighted the fact that words like 'rights' and 'governance' do not translate well because it was difficult to find equivalent words - and 'ideas' - in local languages and, when the need for simplification is introduced as a way to make them comprehensible to the not-always-fully-literate fishers, it became even more difficult to retain their original meaning. Settling for the nearest approximation was fraught with the fears of setting off the SSF equivalent of Chinese Whispers but had to be resorted to as a temporary way out. And, during the consultation process itself, it was repeatedly observed that even where some kind of understanding could be achieved of the ideas and concepts, different people related to them in different ways and responded accordingly. In other words, the problem is not just one of finding the right language; it is also one of different meanings that language suggests to different people. Obviously, there are no simple answers to this concern, but this highlights the need to develop some kind of a common language that transcends the cultural specificities at one level but also allows different people to relate to it in their particular context at another.

The next issue is that, while customary tenure, use rights and entitlements - of various kinds - do exist in several fishing communities, they are not always articulated in such explicit terms. They are frequently mixed up with a range of other processes and services spanning a wide spectrum of activities at the

political, social, domestic and individual levels in the communities, and cannot be easily parcelled out into their different subcomponents. The customary systems are also holistically organised, meaning that they work on an all-or-none principle: either we accept them as a whole or not bother with them at all<sup>2</sup>. To try and pluck out a few bits and pieces (to suit specific interests) even for the sake of discussion may not always be feasible.

Thirdly, getting back to the cultural specificities that may hinder a proper appreciation of ideas and concepts like 'rights' and 'entitlements' in the SSF context of India<sup>3</sup>, the customary systems of 'governance' (another word that has problems transcending the cultural barriers) are based on a different set of criteria: caste, lineage, gender, patronage relations and so forth; in other words, the language of 'rights', and what it portends in terms of power relations within and beyond the customary systems, can be alien to many of the customary systems. It can be an error to equate customary systems of governance with 'rights'-based approaches to governance. In fact, it may well be the case that there will be as much resistance to such ideas within the customary governance systems as there are from the formal systems, because the rights-based approaches can be equally unsettling for both.

Finally, as we shall discuss in this paper, a number of complex and dynamic processes - fuelled by an equally complex range of factors - have been leading to a radical change to the idea of a 'community' itself in the coastal fisheries context (as is probably the case in every other sector as well). With the basis on which the whole idea of tenure and use rights is based being undermined or at least changed, the extent to which such claims in the present context might reflect the historical reality - as opposed to the *imagined* reality - remains to be explored in more detail.

It is probably significant that these particular concerns rose mostly in relation to the component on customary tenure and governance issues, while it was fairly smooth sailing with the other components of the SSF Guidelines.

#### *Tenure rights and governance*

The basis for responsible management, the SSF Guidelines argue, is the existence of secure tenure rights for SSF communities in order that they are able to confidently take part in the decision-making processes governing their life and livelihoods. Most fishing communities have customary rights of tenure and appropriate local governance systems to manage these customary rights and, the SSF Guidelines suggest, a beginning can be made by recognising and legitimising the appropriate customary rights and usage.

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<sup>2</sup> Implicit in this statement is the suggestion that the customary systems may not always be equitable (especially where it comes to the rights of women and other marginalised groups within SSF) and their objectives are not always focused on sustainability.

<sup>3</sup> It is probably wise to confess right away that the author is no sociologist and has no formal training of any kind in basic sociological concepts, so whatever is discussed here comes from personal observations and discussions - including the current crop of consultations - rather than from any formal sociological perspective.

One can discern some kind of pattern as one moves northwards from Kanyakumari and the Coromandel Coast<sup>4</sup> in Tamil Nadu, where there exist well-delineated (and well documented) customary systems of tenure rights and their enforcement. The customary governance systems of the Coromandel Coast are well documented and continue to remain vibrant entities.

Moving northwards, southern and central Andhra Pradesh have customary use rights and governance systems. The customary systems of governance in central AP mainly cover enclosed and semi-enclosed waterbodies and backwaters of the Krishna and the Godavari rivers, and the rule systems governing access to the fishing grounds as well as to the land and other coastal common property resources like forests, ponds, and backwaters in these areas are as extensive and detailed as in any formal legal system. The village boundaries were clearly marked out, which were regularly re-asserted through annual festivals involving elaborate rituals and animal sacrifices. The consultations also pointed out the existence of supra-village institutional systems that existed to address inter-village disputes relating to the use rights.

The northern AP coastal areas, being home to open sea fisheries, do not have elaborate rule systems to support the customary rights to the sea, but the existing customary systems do play a major role in asserting the rights to fishing areas (especially coast-based activities like beach-seining), fish landing sites and marketing sites, as well as to the habitations and vacant lands in the neighbourhood. Besides, they also take responsibility for a whole range of community-related issues, including social development.

An important point to note about the AP and Tamil Nadu systems of customary rights and governance is that they are not specifically focused on fisheries and fishing alone; the role of the customary panchayats extended over the political, social, economic, financial, cultural and religious realms, and even intruded into the domestic affairs of the members. There were well-organised systems of control, taxation, redistribution of surplus, and social protection, which were enforced in collective decision-making processes that did not just include all members, but actually insisted on the participation of all members - except women, non-caste people, and other marginalised categories.

The marine fisheries of Odisha are characterised by fewer customary tenure rights, mostly confined to the extreme north and the south where local communities have been traditionally involved in fishing. The central zone, however is marked by fewer examples of tenure rights, probably because marine fisheries are a relatively new activity in this zone and those who indulged in marine fishing were - at least initially - migrants from the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal states. The non-existence of customary tenure obviously helped these migrants to make a home on the Odisha coast and the idea of the marine fisheries being an open access resource continues to remain strong even today among the fishers. All the same, with competition increasing as a result of more people moving into fishing as well as the increasing penetration of the mechanised vessels into the inshore waters, most of these small-scale

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<sup>4</sup> The Palk Bay seems to have had few endemic marine fishing populations to begin with, requiring little need to ascertain their rights or enforce measures for conflict resolution; this facilitated the arrival of large number of migrants into these areas in the 1970s.

fisheries developed some kind of use rights and the appropriate rule systems to go with them, asserting their rights to particular fishing grounds and fish landing sites. It is the cooperatives and unions which took over the enforcement role in such cases. However, the unsustainability of such claims is evidenced by the fact that the inhabitants of important fishing villages like Pentakota (Puri) and Chandrabhaga (Konark) are constantly threatened with eviction (and - in case of Chandrabhaga - were evicted a few times already) by the State to make way for pilgrims and tourists who flock to these areas.

The backwater fisheries in the Mahanadi estuaries and the Bhitarkanika region in Odisha, largely peopled by immigrants, share an important similarity with the fishing communities of the Sundarbans in West Bengal: they do not seem to have had - to the best of one's understanding - any customary tenure rights or systems of governance to enforce them, initially because they had no need for them (as migrants in a virgin territory, they had more than enough resources to draw upon, without insisting on exclusive rights) and later because they could not have had any even if they wanted to (owing to the various state-enforced conservation processes that came to be implemented in these areas). Also, in West Bengal, there was an increasing emphasis on cooperatives and unions from the 1970s, whose overall purpose does not seem to encompass asserting use rights of the fishers.

Thus, the existence of customary tenure - and the systems of governance systems to enforce them - appears more pronounced in the southern states of AP and Tamil Nadu than in the north. All the same, taken from a holistic perspective (as opposed to fisheries perspective), it would indeed be strange even in the northern zone - e.g., the Sundarbans - if some kind of informal community governance systems were not found to be in existence, to assert some kind of use rights to the resources on which they depend, given their very marginalised existence. Although some minor indicators to support this contention could be obtained through discussions, this was not an area that could be explored in any detail during the consultative process, but it will certainly bear a more detailed study.

While discussing the current status of the customary tenure and the governance systems in places where they do exist (i.e., Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh), there is evidence that these systems in Tamil Nadu are still going strong, probably because they adapted themselves to the changing overall context rapidly. The use rights are probably weaker now and there is also evidence that the systems themselves too are under stress.

The changes that affected the customary tenure in central Andhra Pradesh were discussed in detail by the participants and the following provides a gist of the changes - and their causes - affecting the customary tenure in AP as symptomatic of similar changes occurring all along the east coast.

The most important reason why the customary systems of governance became weak owes to the unwillingness of the government to recognise their existence and accommodate them in the formal decision-making processes. In the early post-Independence years, this owed to the new State's emphasis on 'modernisation' and 'progress' to which the 'traditional' systems - representing caste and all other trappings of a 'backward looking' culture - were regarded as inimical. By the time the 'traditional' systems came to be valorised once again in the 1980s and development focus shifted to the 'community participation', there were already alternative systems - formal panchayats, fisheries cooperatives etc - that

had been competing for the central space in decision-making in the fisheries sector.

The state and the formal panchayat institutions took over the revenue collection from the lease of other common property resources (CPRs) - ponds, grazing lands, salt pans, firewood from mangroves - so the customary systems lost an important source of revenue, and also a handle they had on the members to enforce their will. The loss of these CPRs - and their subsequent alienation for various purposes (shrimp farms, industries, forestry programmes, new settlements, schools, and government offices) - also meant increased hardship for women who lost the open spaces used for toilet, grazing lands and collection of firewood, while being forced to walk longer distances to fetch drinking water. The privatisation of some of these CPRs, for aquaculture or other industrial purposes, meant competition, pollution and social rupture within the communities.

As we shall discuss, the growing realisation of the women's role in the productive as well as the social spheres also gave rise to a strong development focus on developing women's organisations by both the government and the CSOs, which - as we discuss later - meant the rise of new women-based institutions that took over at least some of the traditional roles of customary panchayats, thus further weakening them.

The 1990s saw a spate of new changes: one, the government's liberalisation policies opened the coastal space as the new development destination, which required that any avenues for legitimising the use rights of the fishing communities are even more firmly shut. Next, the increasing levels of literacy and opening up of new opportunities (as well as weakening of the local fishing economies) that led to a major diversification of livelihoods within and beyond fisheries, contributed to a weakening hold of the customary governance systems. The educated youth in the villages have come to disdain customary rules, while the more affluent sections flout them with impunity. The fact that the enforcement of the collective will can no longer be taken for granted makes it increasingly ineffective.

Although its impacts are not fully realised, the more recent practice of the fishers choosing to land their fish catches in a few central locations - harbours, nearby urban and suburban areas - made the village fish landing sites idle with significant impacts on the customary systems. For one thing, the fishing economy shifted its base away from the village; the fishers may still bring the money they'd earned into the villages, but the collective lost its hold on the fishing cycle, fish landings, trading, and incomes, which were important in giving it a control over the local fishing economy. The loss of control over fishing is further aggravated by loss of daily revenue generated from collecting fees from fishers, traders, auctioneers and other outsiders who visited the villages. For the women-traders, this has meant additional hardship as they needed to travel long distances, and pay new taxes, for procuring their supplies and transport them back to the village for processing and trade.

One cannot avoid the conclusion that the customary systems were themselves not built to cope with change: they functioned well only at the local level (although supra-village structures did exist, they too were constrained in terms of their reach) and they were very conservative: their primary role was to maintain the systems in a state of equilibrium, which one fisherman likened to attempts at keeping a fishing vessel stationary in a rough sea. Once the local fish reached global markets and the local people and systems found ways into the mainstream societal processes, the customary systems had to choose

between adapting themselves to the new demands or accept their redundancy. Some of them did try to become even more conservative, as happened in a few cases in post-tsunami Tamil Nadu, but that may not have helped them very much in the long run. In Andhra Pradesh, a number of examples have been related of how the communities' persistence to hold on to their customary rights has led to serious confrontations, including occasional violence, between the communities, and the inter-community relations along the central Andhra Pradesh coast continue are much less cordial than they used to be. The short-term seasonal migrants from one area to another - who worked on a principle of reciprocity - are no longer welcome; the sharing of fishing rights at the river-mouths, where hereditary rights exist for the use of stationary stake nets is increasingly a highly charged affair, frequently leading to conflicts; the assertion of customary rights of one village to fishing grounds or passage rights in creeks or open waters abutting another village are problematised; and the rotation systems for use of fishing gears like the beach-seines are not always harmonious. The recent clash between the AP and TN fishers in pulicat area over the traditional fishing rights is cited as a clear example of the crisis facing the system of customary rights. Such conflicts may have prevailed in the past too, but the fishers' contention is that their frequency and intensity have both increased.

Another factor that contributes weakening the customary use rights is the growing levels of erosion and siltation. As the beaches or the islands in the downstream of rivers get eroded, the working and living space for the communities declines and they find themselves increasingly moving sideways or backwards, barging into one another's areas and giving rise to conflicts. The conflicts, by focusing the issue on the legality of the customary tenure, bring in the formal legal systems - generally the police, the judiciary and the district administration - who generally rule against the customary tenure altogether. The fact that when the process of erosion pushes the fishers away from the sea, as happened in PM Lanka in West Godavari district in AP, they tend to diversify into a range of other activities or into different fish landing sites means that their use right claims fall into disuse if not forgotten altogether. The post-tsunami housing programmes in Tamil Nadu have been reported by the fishers to have contributed to taking them away from the coast to ensure their safety, but which tended to reduce their use rights to the coast and the landing sites.

Wherever new industries have made entry into the coastal areas, especially in Andhra Pradesh, the local communities have been subject to new dissensions; in the villages, the youth (lured by the promise of employment and jobs) and the landed elites welcome the industries, while the old-guard fights against it. The tactics of the new entrants - which include rather 'innovative' use of CSR programmes - drive a further wedge into the communities by creating new dependencies and constituencies for themselves. Having to choose between taking pressure from the government and 'incentives' from the industries, the leaders - i.e., those who do not have agendas of their own - do not have much of a choice, which engenders more mistrust within the communities. All in all, one consequence is that the idea of a 'community' is no longer that sacrosanct. What this lack of trust within the communities implies in terms of implementing ideas like co-management will need careful consideration.

The fact that so much coastal 'development' could take place in a relatively short span of time along the coastal areas is owed to another important factor: the fishing communities have - with few exceptions - rarely invested in land. Even their own homestead land is rarely registered to their name, which means

that the land could be taken away from them with few hurdles. Thus, in most areas, most land - used for agriculture, aquaculture, salt pans, cash-crop plantations, real estate - behind a coastal fishing habitation is usually owned by people of a non-fishing and non-local orientation, which is explained by an old fisher in AP as owing to the fishers' dependence on common property and open access resources rather than to private property as a means to gain security.

Whatever be the status of the customary system of tenure and governance, the non-recognition of the fishers' rights to the fishing grounds, fish landing and processing sites and the fishing habitations remains a major issue of concern in all coastal states. The fishers are not so much concerned about the loss of 'customary governance systems' as with the loss - or lack - of use rights that remain a stumbling block to their safety and security. The consultations pointed out a number of new developments that are threatening their life and livelihoods right across the coast from West Bengal to Tamil Nadu. Some of these threats include: ports; oil exploration, refineries and storage; textile and pharmaceutical hubs; power plants (gas-based and nuclear); coastal tourism; sand-mining; aquaculture and hatcheries; fertilizers; and shipping. A frequent complaint of the fishworkers' movements, i.e., the licensing of the foreign fishing vessels to fish in the Indian waters (described by one FWO representative as the 'colonisation of Indian waters'), is suggested as being related to the lack of rights for the fishers to the fishing grounds. It has been pointed out in all consultations that the small-scale fishers in each state are operating at depths of 200m and beyond, and yet this fact remains to be adequately recognised. According to the FWOs, the fishers' use rights to the sea should cover the entire EEZ and not just the inshore waters.

The absence of use rights or, more appropriately, the failure of the state to recognise the existence of customary systems of tenure rights, is also pointed out as the reason why a slew of conservation and management measures could be implemented with impunity, taking no account of the implications on the fishers or take adequate steps to compensate their losses. Conservation/management programmes targeted at tigers, crocodiles, turtles, mangroves, coral reefs and fisheries themselves are all enforced according to the needs of the implementing agencies and the fishers have no option but to follow the rules.

An emerging issue of concern to small-scale fishers is the increasing securitisation of the coastal areas on account of the fears of cross-border terrorism. The new marine police outposts along the coastal areas, equipped with motor patrol vessels, pose a significant problem for fishing and fishers, with frequent - and none-too-gentle - searches and confiscation of equipment. The need to carry identity cards onboard - which several fishers haven't got - contributes to harassment and loss of livelihoods.

In summary, as a result of the conservation, coastal development and security measures, the fishers have not only lost their customary tenure rights to the coastal and marine resources on which they depended for generations, but have even been alienated to an extent that their access to the coastal and marine ecosystems is subject to conditions imposed by the external players and their agendas.

### *Responsible management of fisheries and ecosystems*

The customary systems of governance, as indicated in the foregoing section, have a fisheries management objective which is focused mostly on conflict resolution (i) between users of the same gear; (ii) between users of different gears; (iii) in inter-village disputes; and (iv) between small-scale and mechanised fishing

fleets. Their capacity for decision-making, and its enforcement, also progressively declined as one moved from (i) to (iv). It is not always clear that their fisheries management role had an overt role in resource conservation and sustainable management. True, they did ban the entry of new nets (like the ring-seines and trammel nets) and new craft (like the mechanised craft in the 1980s) into the communities, but this was more to avoid social disruptions within the communities rather than with a resource conservation objective. That they could not frequently restrain the fishers from using the ring seines or the new craft eventually, or from destructive practices like shrimp-seed collection, indicates that their capacity to enforce their will extended only so far and no farther. The role of the customary management systems also seldom extended beyond the fishing and fish landing sites, meaning that the markets and the various post-harvest actors in the value chain were largely out of their purview. To the extent that they managed to resolve conflicts within the systems and ensured to keep ‘outsiders’ away from the system, their fisheries management is considered effective.

All the same, there were some indirect ways in which the customary systems played a conservation function as well. This included enforcing weekly fishing holidays, seasonal fishing bans (for festivals and other important communal activities), allocating fishing grounds for deployment of different gears on a rotation basis, reducing over-capacity (by restricting the number of gears owned by individuals/families) and competition arising from the entry of outsiders. Their social function included supporting ailing or wounded fishers, the families of fishers who died at sea, ensuring social security for the aged and the destitute, and supporting some social development agendas through communal funds. The linking of social protection measures with the management function ensured compliance from the fishers and effective enforcement of both agendas.

In most cases, the customary fisheries-based regulations worked well; as the AP fishers argued, if the bans on new fishing gear and craft held valid only temporarily, that is at least more than can be said about the effectiveness of the new management regulations which have taken their place. In fact, it has been suggested that if the customary governance systems were not in place, the fisheries sector would have seen more anarchy and violence and it is to their credit that the fishing communities have remained relatively stable in the face of severe provocations over the decades.

What is perhaps very important to note in this context is the existence of a rich culture of indigenous knowledge and wisdom, gained through centuries of practice, that is also linked to these customary systems. Values and beliefs about the sea, the role of sea and marine resources in their cosmology and religious beliefs and practices have all played a role in the communities’ engagement with the ecosystems. There is ample scope for further study of the indigenous knowledge systems and their potential contribution to the formal research processes especially in development and management areas.

The consultations also provided a few examples from West Bengal and Odisha of where the modern community-based organisations, especially the fishworker organisations, have been taking the lead in curtailing destructive fishing practices such as shrimp seed collection and dynamiting. Although there is still some way to go for such initiatives to develop into a full-fledged management programme, these examples are indicated as evidence of a growing awareness among the fishers about their own contribution to the depletion of the resources and their responsibility in managing them more responsibly.

The only formal fisheries management legislation currently in place in each state is the state Marine Fishing Regulation Act (MFRA). The act, originally intended to safeguard the interests of the small-scale fishers against encroachment from the mechanised fishers, is reported by the fishers as becoming much less SSF friendly as it gets burdened with more conservation and management functions. The fishers consider that the different bits and pieces of the management initiatives (covering temporal, spatial, gear-related, species-related restrictions on fishing) do not add up to a coherent and holistic management system, while the capacity of the Department of Fisheries (DOF) to implement the objectives of the Act is considered to be very inadequate. A critical issue - which repeats itself elsewhere in this report - is the fact that, despite the MFR Acts having been in existence for two decades now, most fishers did not have a good understanding of their provisions. Such simple processes as registering a vessel are reported to remain problematic. In an exercise to seek suggestions for improving the MFRA in the AP context, undertaken by the DOF as part of the consultation process, it became clear that the Act and its provisions (such as registration of fishing vessels) get to be interpreted variously in different districts and implemented accordingly. A similar gap exists in case of the other important piece of regulation - the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification (CRZ Notification) - that has relevance to the coastal fishing communities.

Within the government systems, informal feedback from the DOF participants suggests that the current state of knowledge about the small-scale fisheries subsector - including such basic information as the numbers of people and vessels operating from a landing site - remains inadequate and the current data collection systems in all states are hopelessly out of tune with the management needs. The fish landing data collection that was undertaken by the DOFs in all states has now been completely dispensed with. The only time when DOF officers visit the fish landing sites for data collection, as one fisherman remarked in AP, is after a cyclone.

In case of fishing harbours, the DOF officers are reported to visit at the time of the periodical quality inspection visit by an EU team for export purposes. Obviously, the idea of establishing proper monitoring, control and surveillance systems in fisheries has a very long way to go on the east coast of India<sup>5</sup>.

The SSF Guidelines suggest options for better management which include references to co-management and the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF). The only efforts so far to design a co-management system on the east coast of India are as part of the World Bank/FAO supported Fisheries Management for Sustainable Livelihoods (FIMSUL) programme in Tamil Nadu, but the programme is still in the planning stages so far as the co-management arrangements are concerned hence it is difficult to assess its work. The consultations, consequently, could only focus on co-management and its implications for fisheries management in a general sense.

One suggestion that came out of some consultations was that a fisheries management programme, of any

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<sup>5</sup> Also, in a situation where words like 'illegal', 'unregulated' and 'unreported' can be interpreted in different ways to mean everything and nothing, the possibilities for getting a measure of IUU-fishing in the Indian waters remain nebulous.

kind, needs to extend its orbit beyond the fishers (i.e., those who fish) alone. There is a need to focus on the entire value chain, which is not only to ensure equity for all actors in the supply chain (as suggested by the SSF Guidelines), but also for its effective implementation. The decision-making processes relating to fishing come frequently from beyond the coastal area: the 'market forces' play a role as do the trader-financiers who provide the money for the fishers to invest in fishing craft and gear. Without some kind of incorporation of these categories into the management process, the fishers by themselves cannot adopt responsible practices.

Another critical point that the fishers in all states made is that the decline in fish catches is not exclusively owing to over-fishing and destructive fishing alone. While recognising that such factors do contribute to fish declines, the fishers contend that other factors such as pollution and other processes - arising upstream as well as in the coastal and marine spaces - have a more significant responsibility and unless these are controlled, the mere management of fishing activity is unlikely to achieve substantive results. As evidence, the Odisha fishers pointed out that, despite two decades of stringent ban on fishing in the areas where the olive ridley turtles are known to nest, their numbers continue to decline, which then must point to some other factors beyond fishing at work? Similar complaints have been made about the continuing decline of mangroves in Odisha, West Bengal (the Sundarbans) and Andhra Pradesh, where - despite severe restrictions on the fishing communities to avoid entry into the forests - the area, density and species diversity of the mangroves continue to decline. The Sundarbans fishers pointed out the paradoxical case of the Indian side of the Sundarbans continuing to deteriorate despite the long existence of a regulatory regime there, while the Bangladesh side of the Sundarbans continue to flourish despite there being only a nominal management system in place.

Also discussed in this connection are the efforts of the Forest Department (and some well-meaning CSOs) in the Sundarbans and elsewhere (the Krishna river delta basin in AP, the estuarine regions in Odisha) for mangrove regeneration by digging trenches for better water flows in the swamps. The result, according to the fishers, is that the tidal pools within the mangrove areas have been destroyed, and many fish species that used the pools as breeding and nursery grounds have disappeared. In other words, if fisheries in these areas have declined, the reasons must be sought with the fishers, but elsewhere. The fact of large-scale 'fish-kills' that occur in many rivers as a result of large scale release of industrial effluents is cited by most fishers to underline the responsibility of larger forces in the decline of coastal and marine fisheries.

This gave rise to an important question: Is it adequate enough for the DOF and the fishers to sit together and decide upon a management plan to enhance the health of the fisheries? The fishers' contention is that the management process must be a cross-sectoral initiative, involving, *inter alia*, the departments of forest (which implement the conservation programmes), industries (supervising the 'development' initiatives), revenue ('owning' the coastal commons), panchayati raj (local government), rural development, social welfare and women and child development (social support) and the police and Coast Guard (for obvious reasons). As to the practicability of bringing together such a large range of government actors, the fishers pointed out to the existence of district-level platforms (District Development Committees) where the district collector-cum-magistrate takes the lead in coordinating the agendas and ensuring full participation of all departments. Similar bodies exist even at the block level in West Bengal (and possibly other states). The fishworkers' representatives are not currently included in these programmes, but this is suggested as a

potential way forward.

The point to take from the consultations is that the idea of ‘co-management’ is certainly valid and - among the choices available - the more promising in so far as it means concurrent management whereby local institutions are empowered to undertake management measures similar to those undertaken by the State elsewhere. However, it is a lot more complex than a simple bringing together of a number of actors to sit around the proverbial table and thrash things out by themselves. The issues of power and how to ensure its equitable distribution equally and equitably around that table still remain major challenges. For one thing, even if it were possible to bring together such a wide range of agencies, how can this top-heavy and unwieldy patchwork of contending agendas arrive at a coherent fisheries management system? Even at the level it is currently being pitched (i.e., involving only the DOF and the fishers), the process would require deep-rooted ‘systemic’ changes among all the actors for the process to be anything more than simplistic.

As one research student summarised it, the question is: how to allocate the ‘stakes’ among the different ‘stakeholders’ in the management process (say, between a senior forest department official and a woman fish-trader) in such a way that they all balance each other out?

Finally, an important issue that came from the discussions in West Bengal concerned the role that the vulnerable and marginalised communities of the Sundarbans could play in a management process. According to the participants, the long-term objectives of the fisheries management are laudable but, in a situation where earning their daily bread is an uncertain proposition, what immediate incentives could a management process provide to these vulnerable people in order that they can take an effective role in it? In a similar vein, when a DOF officer in Andhra Pradesh likened the seasonal fishing ban to the annual summer vacations given to school children for rest and recuperation, one fisherman-leader retorted that when the schools are closed for vacation, the teachers still receive their salaries, while the ban on fishing is not usually accompanied by similar support for the fishers. The point is that the issue of (immediate) compensation to fishers and fishworkers for any opportunity costs that a management system imposes is an important consideration.

It is also clear from the consultations that the idea of co-management requires a strong political will amongst the policymakers and that is going to take some effort to obtain, especially in the face of the current agendas in all coastal states of privatising the coastal commons for ‘development’ purposes. Still, the fishers see possibilities for joint or integrated management process to work effectively at the lower rungs of the administration - ideally at the district level and below - but as one goes higher up, the potential for delegating or sharing of responsibilities across the board becomes less practical. What came out clearly also is the need for ‘champions’ within the government, probably at the district collector’s level, to steer the joint or integrated management process along the right lines. The role that the DOF itself could play in the process is also considered vital, although the department’s capacity and willingness to take on such a role is considered weak.

## ***2. Social development, employment and decent work***

It is convenient to discuss this section in three separate subsections:

### *Quality-of-life issues*

In terms of access to basic necessities and services, one can discern a pattern from north to south as one moves from West Bengal to Tamil Nadu. As discussed in the section on vulnerable and marginalized communities, the fishing communities of Sundarbans have the least access to even the most basic necessities and services. Roads and communication networks are patchy at best and electricity hasn't reached several communities yet. Safe housing is not always an option in the swampy islands, and one needs to travel long distances by boat to obtain the basic necessities of life. Schools and healthcare facilities - where they exist - are not easily accessible and the government staff, teachers and healthcare workers (mostly hailing from the 'mainland') are not always at hand. Even when they are available, poor infrastructure and lack of provisions (such as medicines) will reduce their effectiveness. Access to safe drinking water, sanitation and child welfare services remains problematic in the Sundarbans and in their neighbourhood.

As one travels downward, Odisha - which had once the distinction of being among the poorest states in the country - seems to have improved its social development record and the fishers' access to basic services is increasing. Obviously, the spread of the services remains patchy and uneven, with some communities (in Balasore, Jagatsinghpur and in some parts of Puri, for instance) receiving better services while others (in Bhadrak and Kendrapara, especially the migrant communities in the Bhitarkanika region) living with much less support. Road access and transport facilities remain a major hurdle for fishing communities all along the state and access to quality healthcare is not easy to obtain.

In Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, the social support systems as well as the overall infrastructure have improved significantly over the years. Road access and transport facilities are widely available, which make a major difference in not only enhancing the fishers' access to the markets, but also allows them to obtain goods and services that are not locally available and help 'mainstream' them into the larger society. That the fishers in Srikakulam (AP) suggest the introduction in late-1990s of a new weekly train passing through that area to Gujarat as a factor that led to a spurt in the migration of local fishers to that state is a case in point. In the private sector, the rapid growth in the numbers of auto-rickshaws has been an important development, both in terms of providing employment to a large number of fisher-youth (as well as non-fisher youth) and ensuring the ready availability of quick transport in most villages.

In both these states, public healthcare continues to remain weak in terms of infrastructure as well as services, but it at least exists and the poorer people do get served. For those who can afford it, private healthcare is available in the nearby urban centres. Programmes like 'Arogyasri' in Andhra Pradesh made a huge difference in improving the poor people's access to quality healthcare and many fishers reported how they'd received the best medical attention at some of the state-of-art hospitals for their ailments, thanks to this programme in which the government undertakes to reimburse all medical expenses of the poorer people for treatment of major ailments - including post-operative care and medicines. The other innovative programme has been the introduction of emergency medical ambulance service - the '108' service - which has made it possible to bring patients in emergencies to the nearby urban areas in a short time, and the number of fishing households that benefited as a result of this service has been quite large.

This is not to say that things are all very well in healthcare in these states, because people even in the more developed states are still forced to take recourse to quacks and faith-healers in large numbers, but the indications are that the formal systems are better now than before and that they are improving further. One cannot also discount the role that indigenous medicinal systems play in 'reaching the unreached' and at least filling in a part of a major gap.

Literacy is on the rise in the fishing communities of all states, and this is the result of a conscious effort on the part of the fishing households (especially women, but increasingly the men too) to put their children through schools. Most villages have government-run elementary schools in AP and Tamil Nadu, and primary and high schools are located not too far away from a fishing village. Even Odisha and West Bengal have more schools now than before. Where the students - especially the girls - need to travel by bus to get to a school, there are provisions for free or discounted fares and most government schools also provide free lunch. In several fishing villages in Odisha, AP and Tamil Nadu, the preference of the parents is to send their children to private 'convent schools', where the medium of instruction is English and - obviously - there are no freebies as in a government school.

The quality of education in the state-run schools remains poor, but the fishers have the additional complaint that the educational facilities - even in the fishing villages - are not tuned to their specific needs. This complaint is not about the curriculum alone, but also that the school timings and holidays are not tuned to the fishing cycle, to facilitate the fishers, especially the women - who are into fishing, fish processing and vending - to leave their children in schools before going off to their work. Migrant fishers - who travel with their families - complain how they cannot manage to send their children because of their peripatetic existence and the difficulties in enrolling them in the local schools. In West Bengal, the fishers also highlighted a rather disturbing rule for enrolment of students: for a child to be enrolled, it is reported that s/he should be living within 3-km radius of the school. In a situation where there is no school to cover every 3km radius in the state (especially in the Sundarbans), one doesn't know the rationale for the rule - or whether it exists at all, although the fishers insist that it does. All the same, it is possible to conclude that in all east coast states, there is certainly an increase in the literacy rates in the fishing villages and, from all accounts, this is likely to rise further.

There has been an improvement in the quality of housing in the fishing villages of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, where the number of thatched houses is coming down in favour of more permanent houses. In Tamil Nadu, this is partly owing to the post-tsunami rehabilitation programmes while in AP, the government housing programmes may have contributed to the construction of new houses. In Odisha too, the number of concrete houses has been going up since the 'Super Cyclone' of 1999, but in the Sundarbans, the process remains sluggish. In AP, wherever the government itself was involved in the construction of the houses, the quality of construction is reportedly poor and the fishers - i.e., those who could afford it - have chosen to build their own houses rather than occupying the government-built ones.

While the quality of houses has improved, the same cannot be said of the sanitation facilities: the women in all states complained about the poor - or, rather, non-existent - sanitation facilities in the villages and the adamant refusal of the men to construct safer toilets. For most fishers, the beach is still the most common toilet which has implications on the health of the community as a whole as well as on the quality

of the fish that they land on the same beaches. But the issue is even more serious for women for whom, the construction of safer, less open, toilets remains the single most important demand. Although there is considerable government support for construction of toilets (the fishers claim that the amount given is hardly enough to construct a toilet), and although the fishers do invest considerable sums of money on new houses - and (as one fisherwoman from Visakhapatnam district put it) do spend on motor cycles, cell phones, LED-television sets, and their tippie - they are disinclined to invest in a proper toilet. With the village commons disappearing as the villages expanded or new activities mushroomed in the neighbourhood, the women face severe hardships in the absence of toilets.

However, aside from the fishermen's reluctance to construct toilets, the problem of space in the overcrowded fishing habitations as well as in the individual households has been pointed out as a reason for the fishers' inability to build them. Already, in villages like Pudimadaka in AP or Pentakota in Odisha, houses are built so close together that there is hardly any space to move between them. Each household frequently houses more than one family, which does make it a very crowded place indeed.

Yet another problem for construction of toilets has been technical: the high water table in the low-lying areas along the coast is said to be an obstacle to putting up appropriate flushing systems. Eco-san toilets are suggested as an option, but have not been put into practice. Community toilets, though tried out in some places, did not work out either because they were located in 'inappropriate' places or did not make provision for regular maintenance. A suggestion that came from the women's groups in AP is to build communal toilets along the lines of Sulabh, and give their management and maintenance responsibilities to the women's group which charge user fees for the purpose.

Crowded habitations is an important issue in itself, because of its implications on a number of things affecting the quality of life of the fishers. With shrinking space and growing populations, many fishing villages face crowding which leads to multiple problems.

For many coastal fishing villages, drinking water remains another major constraint. Even in villages which have now been connected with safe drinking water facilities, there are doubts as to how 'safe' the water really is. Several villages still remain unconnected with such services, forcing women to walk long distances to get water, while in some areas, drinking water is purchased daily. The proliferation of 'mineral water' suppliers has at least meant that the villagers could buy clean drinking water, if they could afford it. The participants at the Chennai consultation mentioned that a sizeable outlay in their domestic budget goes to purchase drinking water (called 'can water').

Although LPG has entered several fishing households, for many fishers, firewood is still the cheaper option so the women continue to cook using firewood collected in their neighbourhood or using coal. While cheaper, this also means longer periods of exertion over cooking, exposure to fumes and other inconveniences with long-term negative benefits.

An important point that has come up frequently is that the fishers' access to fish as food has been declining: the value of fish they catch is frequently so high that the fishers can't afford to eat it anymore. Fishers are reported to be consuming cheaper or lesser quality fish, sometimes brought from other landing centres by fish traders so the fishers sell their own catch to others and buy fish for their consumption from

others. Overall, the consumption of fish by the fishers is probably declining.

Women and child welfare services in the coastal villages are reportedly better in AP and Tamil Nadu, with special programmes like ICDS helping pregnant and lactating women with balanced diet and medication, providing post-natal support for the children, including vaccinations and other services.

Two other 'social evils' have cropped up in the consultations as having critical implications for the fishers' wellbeing in some states: one is the propensity of the fishermen to consume alcohol and the other relates to the continuing practice of early marriages. While there is gradual move away from early marriages as the girls are better educated, the expenses on alcohol continue to mount.

### *Social protection*

A number of social protection schemes - implemented by a wide range of departments - exist in the coastal fishing villages. The fishers, especially the women, seem to have a fair idea of the different programmes that they receive support from, though they do not always know the full details of the programme or which ministry/department is implementing them. The access to such support is almost always, allegedly, mired in corruption, which was inevitable since the recipients were hardly aware of the details of the programme itself.

Based on the feedback from the consultations, the social protection programmes appear to fall into three categories:

- i. those that have been improving over time, which include some that have been discussed in the previous section: healthcare facilities, education systems, housing programmes and women & child welfare programmes. A most important change factor may have been the emergence of women's self-help movement and the micro-credit programmes that have accompanied it.
- ii. those that have remained unchanged over time: these include some subsidy packages - e.g., for construction of fishing vessels, purchase of engines or diesel for fishing - which have stagnated at the level they had been fixed a long time ago, making them either inadequate or effectively meaningless. The packages for lean season assistance (savings-cum-relief) remain fixed at the same sum that they had begun with more than 20 years ago.
- iii. those that have declined with time: these include the various subsidies and support services that the government provided to the fishing communities. The number of vessels and gear that were provided with generous subsidies and favourable terms of credit have come down as the central assistance (under NFDC) declined. Packages that included lean season assistance for the fishers have been scaled down - in Odisha, it is reported that even the fishers' own savings are not being returned in time. The coverage of group insurance remains patchy and the terms of receiving support from it quite difficult for the fishers to fulfil.

Also mentioned in some consultations, especially in both the consultations in Tamil Nadu, is the apparent 'retirement' of fishers from their cooperative membership on attaining the age of 60, which

is reported to cut them off from receiving support from the Welfare Board. This point needs further clarification, but if true, highlights a critical issue of importance relating to one of the most vulnerable and marginalised sections of the society.

In a sense, the support systems may have gone increasingly in favour of social development and away from subsidies for fishing and ancillary activities. The overall implications of this trend may bear closer watch as the shift also coincides with - and probably reflects - a fundamental shift taking place within the SSF itself. Also discussed was the proposed shift in the subsidy regimes from providing essential commodities and services (rice etc through PDS) to cash entitlements; aside from the implications on food security of the fishing households, such measures - by virtue of not keeping pace with inflation over time - can become redundant in due course.

The fishers' perception of the existing social support programmes being implemented by different agencies include:

1. That they tend to be *ad hoc* and one-off. Most support, for instance, flows in after a natural disaster but, once the emergency is past, it stops. Where support is provided - training, for instance - it is seldom followed up with the next steps without which it doesn't work. Infrastructure provision - community halls, cyclone shelters - is not matched by adequate provisions for watch and ward or for regular maintenance, so everything falls to pieces quickly. The fact that such infrastructure could be put to use for a number of other productive purposes is seldom understood.
2. The support systems do not fit into a 'larger picture' to address the community's - or the individual's - needs holistically. Each works in its own way without taking account of what the others are doing and how - or whether - the different activities fit with each other. Contradictions, such as observed in the protected areas, where the Forest Department goes about implementing fishing bans while the Fisheries Department provides new craft and gear on subsidy, have been highlighted from West Bengal and Odisha.
3. Also missing in the lack of coordination between the departments is the opportunity to plug the gaps arising out of new management and conservation agendas as well as from the needs of the fishers themselves to find alternatives. Thus, the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA) programmes in the fishing communities at a time when the seasonal ban is in effect can address the fishers' need for sustenance, but it seldom works out. Positive discrimination policies could provide openings for trained fisher-youth in the Department of Fisheries, in Coast Guard and the Navy, in the Marine Police and in Tourism, where their native skills and knowledge would come handy, but no such provisions exist. Vocational training to enhance the existing skills of the fishworkers is seldom undertaken.
4. The fishers complain that the support packages are not dynamic enough to address the new challenges that the fishing communities face. Seasonal bans, occupational diversification and migration, and sea safety are some of the new challenges that the fishers suggest as necessitating adequate, appropriate and accessible support packages but which remain poorly understood and addressed in the existing programmes. Although some states provide assistance to the fishers to

compensate the loss of fishing during the ban period, this does not cover all actors in the supply chain, or is considered adequate to cover the subsistence needs of the fishers themselves. In AP, it has been reported that the support is released in August while the ban is in force during April-June, making it no more than a cosmetic gesture.

5. The social support programmes tend to be generic, i.e., apply across whole communities, irrespective of the economic and gender disparities, social exclusion and other concerns, with the result that the vulnerable and marginalised people - the older persons, single women-headed households, differently abled, migrants - are frequently missed out in providing support in terms of healthcare, housing, safe drinking water and sanitation facilities, as well as emergency support in case of cyclones and other natural disasters.
6. Similarly missed out are the post-harvest workers, traders and ancillary workers in the support packages. In times of natural disasters or seasonal bans, the impacts of loss of fishing are equally severe for a large number of people, but the support remains focused on fishers and their families.
7. A major gap in the social protection packages relates to the meagreness of the coverage of insurance in the fishing communities. The existing group packages for insurance are inadequate and do not cover everyone in fishing or related activities. With mounting sea safety concerns as well as growing numbers of older persons in the fishing communities, the lack of social protection systems - both insurance and pension schemes - remains a sore and growing necessity.

While it is possible that the location of the fishing communities away from the mainstream and their isolated and rather aloof existence in some cases may reduce their access to social support vis-a-vis the neighbouring non-fishing communities, there is not much evidence to show that the fishing communities on the east coast of India are systemically discriminated against in the programmes. Their 'outlier' status is probably matched by the non-fishing communities in their neighbourhood as well. If there is discrimination, as probably happens in the case of the Sundarbans or the Bhitarkanika communities, it owes more to the fishers' ethnic or geographical origins and their 'migrant' status than that they are into fishing.

Also on the positive side are the very positive impacts that the women's self-help movement and micro-credit programmes have had on the SSF. These programmes in states like Odisha and AP are reported to have reduced dependence on moneylenders, cut the cost of credit by a significant proportion, linked the women's groups to formal banking channels, allowed the families to invest in productive tools, and overall allowed the women to play a more significant social and economic role in the families. Not all women or households in every state benefitted equally nor all SHG programmes are an unqualified success - there are probably more failures than successes in the final count - but that they did mean a major shift in the SSF landscape is undeniable.

On the other hand, there are also many cases where the micro-credit programmes - despite having been in place for nearly 20 years - have made little headway in empowering the members towards self-sufficiency. In all coastal states, the women mentioned, their credit needs cover at least five critical areas: (i) working capital for fish business, which they require for at least two cycles of operation in order to have a better

bargaining power; (ii) fishing and related equipment for the men in the household, whose lack of access to credit is matched - often - by their being the main bread earners in the family; (iii) consumption expenses at home; (iv) festivals and household celebrations; and critically (v) servicing old debts. The last mentioned is so important that, frequently, the women keep borrowing to pay the old debts, thereby getting deeper into indebtedness. Unless a credit package covers all five needs for the women, they say, it is unlikely to make much headway.

One important issue that cropped up during the consultations is the extent of understanding that fishers - including women - have of the various policies, programmes and schemes that they can obtain support from. In states like AP and Odisha (which is very likely applicable across the entire east coast), it has been suggested that a vast range of support programmes already exist, which - if implemented and taken advantage in the right way - could probably address most social development needs of the fishworkers, especially women, adequately enough. However, the fishers' understanding of the schemes and the criteria for their implementation remain weak, as a result of which bureaucracies, red-tape, intermediaries and malpractices flourish. A starting can thus be made by compiling a list of all social support programmes in each state and undertaking an energetic campaign for disseminating the information among the SSF communities.

#### *Employment and decent work standards*

Three issues that need to be discussed in this subsection are: (i) working conditions, including occupational health and sea safety issues; (ii) livelihood diversification and migrants; and (iii) youth in fishing communities.

One of the critical changes in the way fishing is undertaken in SSF is that the fishers tend to go much farther out than before. The sea safety issues have become more serious as the fishers' capacity and interest to invest in better safety devices declined. In the face of a really big cyclone, according to one fisherman, the fishers are more vulnerable today than they were fifty years ago. There do exist some packages to provide the fishers with life jackets and other lifesaving equipment, as well as communication devices, on favourable terms, but the fishers are reluctant to invest in them both because they see that as an extravagance and also because they are concerned about saving space on-board for the long fishing trips. The vessel owners are especially wary about any investments in safety equipment or even in the basic repairs and maintenance of the vessel. As the owners increasingly tend to remain on the shore (especially in the mechanised sector), the crew (increasingly migrants, who are hardly equipped to cope with the demands of offshore fishing) are left to fend for themselves in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

With the distances travelled in search of fish requiring longer durations spent at sea, there are reportedly increasing cases of sea blindness (*photokeratitis?*) and other occupational illnesses that remain hardly explored and scarcely understood, let alone treated. Eyesight-related problems in the fishing villages came up as an issue in Andhra Pradesh.

Other issues relating to occupational and sea safety relate more to the migrants from the east coast working on the west coast fisheries. The varieties and processes of the trans-border movements vary

widely, but the one constant is the extent to which the migrants allow themselves to be exploited and remain extremely vulnerable and marginalised in every sense. Long periods of living on-board, poor living and working conditions, lack of safety and healthcare services on-board, lack of formal work and insurance agreements, no government recognition or support, long periods of separation from the families and alienation from the local communities and hazardous deep-sea fishing conditions can amount to poor conditions of work. The fact that the migrants to Gujarat are also subject to being captured by the Pakistani Navy and kept in jails for extended periods also brings the cross-border complexities into the picture. The Bengali fishers straying into Bangladeshi waters are not held captive, but the local fishers confiscate their nets or harass them otherwise before letting them go back. A similar complaint is made against the Sri Lankan Navy by the Rameswaram fishers at the Ramnad Consultation, who claimed that - contrary to the decent treatment meted out to the straying Sri Lankan fishers in Indian waters - the same treatment was not forthcoming from the Sri Lankans against the Indian fishermen caught in their waters. The Rameswaram fishers contention was that basic human rights standards must be maintained while arresting the fishers for intrusion.

The inter-state migration of fishers also covers a range of non-fisheries related activities such as work in construction, brick-kilns and other urban occupations. Being unskilled, the migrants must settle for all sorts of employment at whatever wages are offered. Travelling frequently with their whole families, the fishers do face severe hardships. As a few examples from Bengal and Odisha in the recent times showed, the migrants' and their families' access to basic human rights and formal employment processes is very inadequate.

In this connection, the role of the local communities themselves in how they welcome, treat and integrate the migrants needs consideration. In a majority of cases, the migrants are tolerated at best and discriminated against at worst. Even on the east coast, which is generally a 'supply' area as far as migration is concerned, where there exist instances of in-migration - whether seasonal or of a long-term nature - the local communities show a degree of hostility towards the migrants (while drawing upon their services at the same time) which is reflected in not allowing them to be counted in support programmes and such like. Even in states like Odisha, which had long been an exception to this, there are examples where fishers have become more assertive of their 'territories'.

The growing levels of literacy in the fishing villages has given rise to a new category of vulnerable and marginalised people: the increasing numbers of educated youth in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha who consider fishing too lowly an occupation to fit their newly literate status but whose educational attainments are hardly enough to find reasonable employment. These 'expensively unemployed', as an Andhra Pradesh fisher put it, remain a source of serious concern in the communities and a wastage of valuable human resource.

The points to take from the foregoing paragraphs may be: that the inter-state migrants may require a careful study in order to develop more systematic efforts to improve their working conditions; that the growing numbers of educated youth - whose progressive ideas may allow better engagement in areas like fisheries management - can also be a vital resource in development.

### ***3. Value chains, post-harvest and trade***

The following paragraphs provide a summary of key points that emerged under this section in the consultative processes.

Women, who constituted a sizeable proportion of post-harvest actors and in the value-chains, are facing serious competition with changes in: fish disposal systems (increasingly fresh or frozen), quantities handled (from small individual lots to bulk), varieties handled (from prime quality fish to cheaper, semi-spoiled, fish), markets (from local to urban and export), transport systems (from simple/public transport to sophisticated private transport), investments (from a few thousands to extremely large sums), and procurement arrangements (from open auctions to long-term advances). In a nutshell, the entire post-harvest system has changed to an extent where the women are increasingly consigned to ancillary functions.

The women's role in domestic local trade - for fresh and traditionally processed fish - remains strong, but the share of this particular market segment itself is shrinking in the overall supplies. Alongside the women, the other SSF casualties in the process are the bicycle fish-vendors, who - if anything - are even more marginalised because in several cases they hail from the neighbouring non-fishing communities and hence remain 'outsiders' to the system.

Alongside a decrease in the overall market share, the local fish trade also saw a rapid growth in the number of people - both from fishing and non-fishing communities - entering the fish trade, putting a further squeeze on the supplies and the markets. "How can you cope with competition when your competitors are your own mother or sisters?" asked one fish trader in AP. She also pointed out that her conventional clients - who included a few hotels - shifting to the new traders who were able to offer better quality fish in larger numbers for cheaper prices.

A kind of Catch-22 situation prevails in the case of traditionally processed fish, i.e., dried and salted products. Over the years, the products have hardly moved up either in terms of market acceptability or in terms of quality upgrades - the one being dependent on the other, neither of them makes any headway! Although super-markets were seen as a potential way forward for the processed fish, the decision of most super market chains to desist from sale of fish and fish products in the recent past reportedly dashed those hopes (as happened in case of Samudram fisherwomen's collective in Odisha).

Fish losses - quality, value and nutritional - continue to be very significant in most SSF on the east coast of India. In many ways, despite the entry of ice, preservation systems and quick transport systems as well as burgeoning markets, fish losses remain endemic in the production, processing, transport and marketing systems. This is particularly acute as one moves from Tamil Nadu in the south to West Bengal in the north. Part of the reason is the incomplete or patchy penetration of ice and preservation systems along the value chains. Another reason - especially in relation to processed fish - is the poor market development, in both physical and economic senses: better product does not automatically fetch better price. Finally, the way fishing, landing, processing and sorting, packaging and transport and marketing are organised in the SSF, there are many ways in which delays, contamination and losses can occur in the value chain. All of this leads to value losses, not always counted or monetised, but which - if addressed - can certainly enhance

the SSF incomes quite significantly.

The women fish processors' usage of the beaches for fish drying remains a cause of major losses - glut landing of small pelagic fishes, which are dried, coincides with monsoonal conditions, with the result that the women periodically lose significant investments to rains and infestation. If they take measures to address losses, as in Odisha or in West Bengal (possibly elsewhere, e.g., in Andhra Pradesh), it is reported that this involves usage of pesticides like Lindane which may have health implications.

Infrastructure, transport and preservation facilities remain extremely poorly developed in most areas to cater to the needs of the post-harvest workers and the traders. The fish landing sites, sorting and processing sites, and the marketing areas are all very badly designed as far as the needs of the fish traders and processors are concerned. The markets rarely give attention to the needs of the fish sellers and frequently consign them to a corner that is poorly ventilated, badly maintained and hardly in a position to attract buyers. Despite the fact that most fish-sellers are women, there are poor facilities to ensure their safety and security or even to meet their basic needs such as toilets, changing rooms and drinking water.

Lack of access to preservation systems - i.e., iceboxes - is highlighted as a reason for the fresh fish sellers to resort to distress sale, but the women also pointed out that their working capital must come from the sale of fish, so they can't really hold on to the fish until they can obtain the best prices. Iceboxes - and access to ice that this requires - are essential, but the women's working capital needs are also of paramount concern in avoiding distress sales.

Most women fish sellers in all states complained about the difficulties in transporting their fish to the nearest markets: the public transport systems are not geared to cater to the fish vendors' needs and consequently the women face considerable hurdles in transportation. Women work in batches to hire auto rickshaws for transporting fish but complain that the transportation costs far exceed their daily earnings.

On the other hand, there is agreement that the market prices of fish have never been better. In all states, including West Bengal, marine fish consumption has picked up in a major way and, owing to health consciousness and large disposable incomes, the middle classes appear to be willing to pay very good prices for fish, which helps offset the shortage of supplies to a good extent.

For fish processors, who used the open beaches for drying their fish, there has been shrinkage of drying space as a result of erosion, expansion of the fishing villages or the neighbouring urban areas, or arrival of new industries. For several women, for whom the availability of the beach for fish drying is as much a part of their business calculations as the availability of fish themselves, the reduced access to beaches means withdrawal from the activity. For the fish-smoking women of the Godavari delta area in AP, the restrictions on the collection and usage of firewood from the neighbouring Coringa mangrove has meant a stoppage of fish smoking, which is gradually slipping into extinction in the area.

Most of these problems are age old, going back at least to the dawn of modernisation of Indian fisheries, but that they still persist is owing to a significant fact suggested by a women's leader from Odisha: aside from a few giveaways now and then, there has not really been a systematic effort at understanding the post-harvest actors' needs and develop comprehensive action plans to address them in a holistic manner.

Even the proliferation of micro-credit programmes hardly addressed the women's working capital needs because the money rarely amounted to a large enough sum to give the women the financial security needed for carrying out their business.

A number of varieties of seafood, harvested in the SSF subsector, goes into the international markets, but the SSF actors' role stops with supplying the catches to the exporters' agents on the beach or, at most, in the nearby town. From then on, the course that the seafood takes, the global markets it reaches, and the price it fetches are all a closed book to the producers. The idea of the SSF actors taking a more direct role in the export supply chains is considered not even thinkable in the present context.

In this context, the role of the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) came up for discussion and there were many complaints that the MPEDA's support is confined to large-scale entrepreneurs in fishing, aquaculture and seafood processing, and hardly any of this support reaches the SSF. A few iceboxes here and there and a few awareness programmes on quality aside, MPEDA's focus on SSF remains minimal.

The impacts of export demand on local SSF fisheries and fish trade are considered significant from the beginning, but there has been no recent spurt in export demand that would have necessitated intensification or diversification of effort or species marketed. If anything, the export focus seems to have shifted increasingly to aquaculture, so much so the wild catches of shrimp are finding their way into the domestic urban markets, reportedly at a higher price than is offered by the exporters. The fact that more fish are going to urban and inter-state trade has certainly an impact on the varieties of fish that the local fish sellers have access to: as the 'top' species are siphoned off into these markets, the local sellers settle for lesser or cheaper or poorer quality varieties for domestic sale.

In all states, the consultations came up with the complaint that there exists no mechanism to provide up-to-date market information - especially on fish prices - to the SSF actors. Although the idea of providing such information along the lines of agricultural commodities by radio and other devices was discussed, the peculiarities of fish trade - perishability, uncertainty in landings, differences between landing sites/markets, the fishers' & traders' access to particular markets and trade-credit linkages etc - were taken note of as limiting the potential usefulness of the market information system.

One area where several CSOs and some government bodies have spent considerable time, effort and resources in the post-harvest sector is in training fisherwomen in preparing value-added products in ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat forms, with an objective to reach the urban upper- & middle-class markets. Despite large numbers of such training programmes from West Bengal to Tamil Nadu over two decades, there is as yet no evidence that the value-added products have added any value to the women's incomes.

Finally, in terms of fishworkers' associations in the post-harvest sector, there exist a few, largely CSO-supported, efforts along the east coast, the most significant of these being the Samudram network in Odisha. Fisherfolk Foundation in AP too has been in the process of setting up a post-harvest collective with women members. But these efforts have not yet reached a position of sustainability either institutionally or for the individual members. Although the post-harvest workers are as much a part of the fishing economy as the fishers themselves and are equally affected by the decline in fish catches and the

seasonal fishing bans, the current ideas of fisheries management do not really take them into account. Nor do they receive any assistance during the fishing ban period.

#### **4. Gender equality**

On the issue of gender equality, which - in practice - boiled down to discussing the women's empowerment and related issues, the consultations (some of them, at any rate) offered a dynamic picture of the changes in women's roles and responsibilities in the fishing communities in the last few decades, with the possible exception of the Sundarbans in West Bengal where things may not have changed much for the women (or for men, for that matter) over the decades. The picture for the rest of the east coast shows that, alongside a slew of positive changes, there have also been a number of additional pressures and burdens that the women have had to bear, while some structural weaknesses in their position vis-a-vis the social systems within the SSF remained intact.

The emphasis on women in the development processes in the last two decades, as discussed in a previous section (on social development), has meant that their awareness, skills, knowledge, access to financial resources and institutional support increased significantly. Alongside, as fishing became increasingly uncertain and formal credit and insurance became inaccessible to the fishers (i.e., men), there arose a need for the women to step in and take the responsibility of (i) obtaining the credit support needed for repair and replacement of fishing equipment and tools and (ii) working on a diverse range of occupations to sustain the families. The women fishworkers affiliated to the Samudram network in Odisha provide a good example of managing to link their microcredit programmes with the banks as well as accessing enough loans to service their husbands' production related needs, while also diversifying into a range of occupations - ranging from port labour to petty trade in urban areas - that ensured a steady family income.

Meanwhile the government's emphasis on the women also gave rise to a number of social protection programmes aimed at their wellbeing: several departments - Rural Development, Social Welfare, Health and Child Welfare, to name a few - had special programmes to address the women's needs - both productive and reproductive. It needs to be mentioned that, most of these programmes followed the typical government route: each programme had its own rationale, with rarely any coordination or harmonisation with the other programmes or with a higher objective in mind. The success of these programmes frequently owed to their magnitude and spread over a large target population, which meant that even if only a few initiatives succeeded, their numbers were still sizeable enough. Still, that they managed to hit a few targets must be acknowledged in their favour.

Reservations of seats in the local panchayats and higher positions for women ensured their participation in the decision-making processes. The growth of women's collectives at the block, district and higher levels was another - not very successful - initiative in the same mould.

With women becoming an important contributor to the household economy, their role in the decision-making processes at home improved: as one woman pointed out, it was only when the women started taking the lead at home that the literacy rates in the communities started going up. Their access to, and interactions with, the district administration and sundry government and bank officials helped them to gain additional prestige in the eyes of the community. In some villages, the women's groups were

encouraged to become contractors for undertaking all public works in the area, thereby improving the quality of work, reducing costs and also saving some money for themselves.

However, the increasing prominence gained by the women came with a price. As one fisherwoman from Pudimadaka in Andhra Pradesh asked: placing emphasis on women in all development activities is all very good, but is it really helping them or is it so much extra pressure that they must bear? The woman's point was that when she becomes the recipient of a loan that her husband will use for his fishing equipment, the burden of repaying falls on her - whether he helps or not. There are also cases where the women's earnings get to be increasingly taken for granted by their husbands to an extent where they stopped paying for the household expenses altogether, or even give up fishing themselves to stay at home and probably play cards, becoming an extra burden for the woman. When the men migrate outside the area, they expect the woman's earnings to keep the family going so their monthly remittances may arrive a few months late or sometimes never. The women thus have to bear the dual responsibility of keeping the family hearth burning, while also taking care of the household management: looking after the children and the aged parents and other social obligations, including the paying off of old debts.

Where women are in positions of power, another important concern raised in the consultations was: how much power do they really hold? In West Bengal, Odisha and AP, it has been suggested that the woman may sit in the chair but the actual power frequently rests with her husband or father who are the real decision-makers.

Most women also complained how the 'capacity building' programmes that they receive from the government or from the CSOs are simply training programmes with no thought - or action - to extend support in the related areas: forging backward and forward linkages, and addressing the existing power relationships in the community, in the markets and in the larger social and political spheres. This 'unpreparedness' to cope with the challenges that a few half-baked training programmes expect them to address could also lead, as explained in the AP consultation, to counter-productive results.

This raises some questions about the engagement of the CSOs with the women in fishing communities. While some CSOs had a long-term engagement with clear long-term vision of what they wanted to achieve, several others - especially in the post-tsunami context in Tamil Nadu, post-'Super-Cyclone' in Odisha, post-1996 cyclone in AP, and post-'Phailin' in West Bengal - had more short-term engagement, which was focused more on social development issues than on the fisheries context in which the women lived and worked. This weak fit between the social development agendas and the fisheries context (which is a reverse of how the Department of Fisheries went about 'development') will need to be addressed, both in terms of making the CSO/government interventions more holistic and also in terms of making the work that the CSOs and the governments do to be mutually complementary.

An important point that must be stressed is that not all women benefited from the development programmes or from the new opportunities for diversification. For every woman who gained from the processes, quite a few were left behind, and not a few - especially single women - found themselves facing the future without a sustainable livelihood or any other means of support. Malnutrition, early marriages, large families, poor and hard working conditions and low incomes take a toll on women's

health and make them look aged before they reach 40. The existence of large numbers of single-women in the fishing villages has already been noted. Even women who are fairly well educated (by the community standards) and desperate for employment continue to find it difficult to step out of the community boundaries for fear of social opprobrium.

In terms of basic necessities, as already indicated, the sanitation facilities in the communities remain very poor. Several women must still go long distances to fetch water. Girls frequently stop their studies after high school, to look after the younger children and to be married off at the earliest opportunity. Girls barely into their 20s already being mothers of 3 or more children is not an infrequent sight in the SSF.

Coming to the women's livelihoods, the fisherwomen's production-related activities along the east coast (from West Bengal to Tamil Nadu) traditionally included: collection of firewood and honey from the mangroves, mollusc shells, crab and small fish, shrimp seed and juvenile fish, and seaweed. Paradoxically, most or all these activities - from the Sundarbans down to the Gulf of Mannar - are banned for one reason or another, so the women are being effectively evicted from fishing. There are few provisions for helping these women to find sustainable alternatives; where they do exist, as in the Sundarbans, the suggested new activities like ornamental fish culture and poultry rearing suffer from lack of market linkages. And women are not even included in the list of beneficiaries to receive support during the seasonal fishing ban period.

In post-harvest fish processing, the shrinking space for them on the beaches, at home and at markets as a result of competition and overcrowding, the women's capacity to make a living from dry fish is declining. In fresh fish trade, the competition to the women come from three sources: other women from the fishing communities who need to work and - finding no alternatives - get into fish trade; the bicycle and motorcycle fish vendors from outside; and the new entrants into fish trade from the neighbouring non-fishing communities who find this a little more remunerative than the shrinking work opportunities in agriculture. The alienation of the common property resources in the neighbourhood of the villages and the centralisation of fish landings to fewer locations have meant considerable hardships - physical, social and economic - for the women.

In times of natural disasters, the specific needs of women when evacuated to the cyclone shelters or in the relief and rehabilitation processes are hardly addressed. The specific implications of the cyclone-related programmes on women will be discussed in the next section. A CSO-representative recounted some insights from the needs assessments carried out in the aftermath of the 2014 Hudhud cyclone in AP: while the men's needs were focused on expectations of compensation for losses to their equipment (pegged at unrealistically high figures for equipment that was hardly damaged), the women's needs assessment highlighted the need for safer housing, drinking water and sanitation facilities. While the men were willing to stay off fishing until compensation was paid out, using the time to play cards, the women were scurrying from pillar to post to make temporary shelters, to collect drinking water, to borrow groceries and other essentials to keep the children from starving.

As indicated in the foregoing section, there are no integrated programmes within fisheries to address the needs of the women in post-harvest and trade holistically. In the broader development agendas, whether

government- or CSO-driven, there is limited understanding about the women's access to use rights and customary governance systems, the threats to their livelihoods and the vibrant livelihood diversification processes that characterise their current livelihood context. The impacts of inter-state migration on the women, the adaptive and coping strategies they adopt, and the near-absence of social protection programmes to help them in the processes remain hardly understood, let alone addressed. Even the women's strong demand for proper sanitation facilities in the fishing villages has hardly made it into any of these programmes.

While some women's organisations exist along the east coast, only a few of them work on agendas that reflect the changing SSF context and the emerging challenges and opportunities for women even when fisherwomen constitute a sizeable proportion of their membership. Within the fisherwomen's organisations, the group dynamics are said to be not always conducive to develop common agendas as the members themselves are not always homogeneous; as elsewhere there are elites within each group who, either by virtue of their status in the society or their intellectual/vocal abilities, dominate the decision-making processes, resulting in maintaining the status quo. The linkages that the women's groups have with the existing fishworkers' organisations (FWOs) remain weak and in the latter, although fisherwomen do get membership, their representation in key positions - it is reported - remains small.

In summary, depending on one's viewpoint, the implications of the changes on the women's role and status in the SSF on the east coast of India represent a case of 'glass-half-full' or 'glass-half-empty'. There has been progress in several areas - and the heartening fact is that the momentum is largely being maintained. But things have also stagnated or even regressed in other areas (especially in case of the women's productive role in fisheries) and here too, the momentum does not show any signs of slackening. It is possible that the increased role, support and prominence that the women gained over the last two decades may have helped them - and the fishing communities as a whole - to keep pace with the changing livelihood and macro-economic context, but this may not have been adequate enough to encompass all women or to take them to a higher level of strength or even to keep up with the changes for long.

##### ***5. Disaster risks and climate change***

The effects of climate change - changes in current, wind and wave patterns, rainfall and seasonality, temperature, erosion pattern, natural disasters and sea swells - alongside their implications for the availability/breeding/behaviour patterns of fish appear to have been observed in all states with varying levels of intensity, but the fact remains that it becomes difficult to differentiate the local from the global and the natural from the manmade in understanding these changes.

For instance, the changes in currents and wave patterns, fish movements and erosion in Puducherry appear to have been caused more by the construction of sea-walls and other 'protective' mechanisms than from climate change. Similarly, the change in the ecological patterns of the Sundarbans over the decades is said to be a result as much of the upstream developments (such as construction of the Farakka Barrage, release of industrial effluents, and changes in river courses) as of climate change.

On the other hand, the fishers in Odisha also pointed out that some supposedly human-induced changes to the coast and species such as olive-ridleys could actually be the result of larger - as yet not clearly

understood - global processes that may well be part of climate change. There are also other processes - like the erosion of the coastal fishing village of Uppada in Andhra Pradesh - which have been going on for so long as to make ascribing such changes in the coastal contour either to the human agency or to climate change probably anachronistic.

However, what the consultations have clearly agreed is that the growing levels of pollution in the sea, largely man-made and largely coming from the industrial, agriculture, aquaculture and urban areas, do lead to significant long-term changes to the seas, leading to acidification, temperature rise and other changes associated with climate change, thereby aggravating and expediting these patterns. There is also awareness about the fisheries sector's contribution to these processes, with trawling being pointed out as a major culprit, but the role of the SSF is not always recognised or accepted. Given the relatively small contribution that the SSF make to global carbon emissions and so forth, this is probably understandable, but the issue needs to be flagged all the same.

The fishers pointed out the inefficiencies of the engines that they use, the spurt in the use of higher horse-powered engines (which however did not last long as the economic realities forced some of the fishers to switch back to lower HP engines), and the need to redesign their vessels which require unnecessarily high fuel consumption. Fishing farther out in the sea, need to carry a large number of nets and good quantities of ice on-board, and the competition to get to the fishing grounds and to the markets are reported as the reasons for excessive burning of fuel and for the need for speed.

On land, the increase in the number of auto rickshaws in the coastal fishing villages is said to contribute to the pollution significantly, but given their importance to the fishing economy, employment potential as well as to the fishers' access to basic necessities, any effort to curb them is not considered worth the effort; in any case, there are efforts to make the autos to switch to compressed natural gas (CNG) in some areas. The export processing plants have some climate change implications, owing to the freezing and other ammoniacal processes, but their numbers are considered too small to make much of an impact.

Coming to the natural disasters, there is recognition that one major cyclone a year has become the norm in the last decade. However, with the exception of the Sundarbans, it is agreed that the early warning systems have improved significantly which meant a considerable reduction in the loss of life. However, the fishers point out a number of other problems in the government's preparedness to address natural disasters like cyclone:

While advance information on the cyclones is increasingly reliable, there is still a credibility gap that is aggravated by the scare-mongering in the media. Aside from the quality of information, it is necessary that the means of transmitting the information to the people are also robust and trustworthy.

The efforts to preserve the lives of the coastal people are not matched by the efforts to preserve their livelihoods, i.e., ensuring the safety of their fishing equipment and their home and hearth when they are evacuated. The result is that people may survive but are left with few means to make a livelihood, let alone face future disasters more confidently.

The process of evacuation is not gentle, as the people are literally bundled out of their homes. The shelters

are not well planned, and all basic necessities are in short supply. The specific needs of the women are hardly given a thought so they have problems in finding space for toilet, bathing etc. The food and water distribution is extremely poor, inadequate and unevenly distributed. The community is not allowed to take the responsibility for distribution and maintenance of the shelters even while the administration does not have the capacity to do either effectively.

The existing cyclone shelters in the coastal villages in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, especially the latter, are in a dilapidated position, and taking shelter in them is frequently more of a risk than staying at home. Management and maintenance of the cyclone shelters rests with the Revenue Department, which has neither the resources nor the manpower to maintain them well. The fishers suggest equipping a few big private houses in the villages to handle emergencies so as to reduce crowding, costs of maintenance of public infrastructure, and secure access for women to basic needs.

The relief and rehabilitation efforts remain ad hoc and patchy: despite the regular occurrence of cyclones along the coast, there is no well-structured machinery that can swing into action and take care of the pre- and post-cyclone support measures, with the result that political influence, anarchic planning and lack of coordination between agencies characterise the relief and rehabilitation efforts. The critically vulnerable - those living in thatched houses, or living directly on the beach, or with no productive assets, or single-women - are marginalised as the local elites dominate the processes.

An important point made in some of the consultations is the issue of mental health which is very important in a disaster context (the stress and anxiety prior to the cyclone as well as in its aftermath, relating to the destruction of property, the loss of home and hearth - and occasionally the people one has known and lived with), but this receives very little attention in the preparedness, relief and rehabilitation programmes. The hurry with which the relief efforts are undertaken also give rise to concerns relating to the extent to which human rights and other international and national provisions for relief and rehabilitation are being taken into account. The hurry to get things done - and to be seen to have got things done - also means that 'building-back-better' is not frequently a concern at all.

The rehabilitation assistance - in terms of compensation for repair and replacement of lost assets - seldom reaches the affected people in time; it could take months before reaching the people who might in the meantime have to borrow from private moneylenders to get back into business. That the fishers and fishworkers are dependent on a range of other sources of supplementary income - cashew plantations, mangroves, agriculture - and the loss of those resources also affects their overall wellbeing both in the immediate term and in the long term is not adequately noticed. The package rarely includes compensation to the women fish sellers and processors, and when it does, the quantum of support is very small anyway and also covers only a few people. The other shore-based workers in the value chains seldom - never - receive any support except where they have other claims (loss of house or other assets) to receive support. Migrants and people of non-fishing-castes seldom make it to the lists to receive support, as even the local communities do not consider them as being eligible.

## **E. Policy-institutional context defining small-scale fisheries on the east coast of India**

This section deals with the policy-institutional context that defines the small-scale fisheries management

and development on the east coast of India and the framework for discussion is derived from the SSF Guidelines to keep the discussion focused on the key elements and not stray too far and too wide.

### ***1. Policy coherence, Institutional coordination and collaboration***

The foregoing sections have dealt with several policy-institutional issues relevant to each component of the SSF Guidelines. In this section, an attempt will be made to bring together the various strands and summarise some overarching conclusions.

Policy coherence component of the SSF Guidelines focuses on the harmonisation of the policies, legislation and other international and national instruments relating to, inter alia: economic development, energy, education, health, rural development, environmental protection, food security, nutrition, labour, employment, gender, trade policies, fisheries sector policies, disaster risk management and climate change adaptation. The SSF Guidelines also highlight the importance of spatial planning through participatory and consultative processes. The consultations made it clear that the lack of policy coherence remains a major stumbling block for meaningful implementation of the development and management agendas in fisheries.

There are at least four ways in which this is reflected:

- i. *Coherence issues within the policy objectives of the same ministry/department:* the broad policy objectives for fisheries at the national level can be said to include four areas: increasing production, livelihood support, social welfare and conservation/ management. The policies/legislation to support each of these objectives do not necessarily take account of their implications for the other two. Thus, conservation programmes - such as seasonal fishing ban - do not consider their livelihood implications (for instance, up to 60 percent of the motorised fishing incomes in some states are reported to come during April-May, the months coinciding with the fishing ban) or the welfare implications (the subsistence needs of the SSF - including the various value-chain actors - during the ban period). Similarly, while the use of fishing gears using less than 10mm mesh-size - which most trawl nets use at their cod-end - are banned by law, the same ministry provides subsidies for fuel and other onboard facilities for the trawlers. Also, the focus on 'fisheries development' means that the support is mostly focused on providing fishing equipment and related infrastructure for increasing production, but neither post-harvest issues - to preserve and market the increased produce in a better way - nor social support - insurance and pensions, for instance - are given adequate prominence.
- ii. *Coherence issues in the cross-sectoral policies/legislations (horizontal integration issues):* This applies to the way that the different ministries - Environment and Forests, Agriculture (Fisheries), Commerce (the Marine Products Export Development Authority), Industry, etc - go about making and implementing policies and legislations without any coordination - or even communication - among themselves. The MOEF implements a number of conservation programmes all along the east coast of India which, as we have seen, have serious repercussions for the SSF, but the Fisheries division in the MOA does not have a say in the matter. Similarly, the state ministries of industry go about providing licenses to new industrial development along the coastal region, again without any consultation with the fisheries authorities. The Fisheries Department in Andhra Pradesh has been

reportedly trying for the last 15 years to construct a new fish landing jetty near Kakinada, to facilitate the berthing of one of the largest small-scale fishing fleets on the east coast of India, but the proposal has remained stuck with the Port Department which objects to the construction as the land falls under their control, although they have no plans to develop it in any way.

A more critical absence is the lack of linkages between fisheries and social development ministries and departments such as health, education, housing, food, water supply and sanitation, civil supplies, electricity, labour and employment, women, child development, rural development, etc. While such linkages exist at the district and sub-district levels of implementation, and most especially at the community level, the higher, policy-level, bodies are not so well coordinated, with the result that a number of support services - covering health (including occupational health issues), education, drinking water and sanitation, infrastructure and communications etc - that can address the needs of the fishing communities by making specific provisions for them and by fine-tuning the activities to address the emerging concerns of the fishers are not being taken advantage of. This is particularly striking as most social development departments are reported to have funds that are not only quite large in comparison with those of the DOF, but most of those funds are lying unutilised for lack of good proposals to spend them on.

A number of fishers noted how programmes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) can step in at the time of seasonal bans to help them out with alternative work opportunities, but this does not happen as there is no coordination between the concerned ministries. It has also been suggested that important SSF concerns like insurance and pensions can be far better implemented with a wider reach and better packages if only there is better coordination between the various concerned ministries and departments. The idea of the Department of Fisheries acting as a champion to ensure the fishers' access to better support/services has also been discussed, but the conclusion is that the departments - in their current state - do not have the capacity for such a role.

At a third level, the absence of cross-sectoral collaboration also works against the opportunity to learn from, and transplant, the ideas from one sector to another; thus, ideas like use customary tenure and how they have been tackled in related sectors like forestry, inland water bodies and dryland agriculture may have relevance to the SSF context, but such efforts at cross-sectoral hybridisation of ideas are lacking. Even CSOs with multi-sectoral portfolios that include fisheries do not seem to have worked to seek possible synergies between the various sectors that they have engaged with.

- iii. *Coherence issues in the vertical integration of the policies/legislations from the Centre to the local levels:* The fact that fisheries up to the limits of territorial waters is a state subject in India has meant that each state has its own fisheries instruments that are not necessarily harmonised with the Central policies or with each other. The fishers also complain that while some states reportedly provide a better compensation to the fishers during the seasonal ban period, some others don't. The fishers also pointed out contradictions in implementation of legislations even within a state, as important legislations like the MFRA get to be interpreted differently in different coastal districts, resulting in

confusion and unnecessary hardships to them.

- iv. *Coherence issues in the involvement of the local bodies, SSF associations and actors in the implementation processes:* This is because, firstly, local panchayat bodies are more or less excluded from implementation of the fisheries programmes. Even where the panchayats are dominated by the fishers themselves, their role in the implementation of the fisheries policies is minimal in all states. The fishers consider this to be a major shortcoming as the panchayats have the necessary presence and capacity to implement the fisheries programmes more equitably and with less opposition from the fishers. There is a need to ensure that the constitutional provisions for the involvement of panchayats in fisheries (Eleventh Schedule of Indian Constitution, where fisheries are listed as item 5 of Article 243G) are duly implemented.

Secondly, the fact that policy-making remains one-size-fits-all strategies is an issue noted in many consultations. The local specificities and the varying needs of different actors within and across categories are not taken account of, with the result that the development policies fail to address the SSF needs appropriately.

Thirdly, the recent practice of involving the fishworker organisations and selected SSF actors in some ‘consultative’ processes for planning or implementation of activities is said to be frequently no more than a formality, as the substantive issues would have been pre-determined anyway and the fishers and FWOs participation was basically to justify those decisions as having been ‘participatorily’ arrived. Where the district administrations hold Public Hearings to discuss about a new industrial venture coming into a coastal area, the fishers complained, the issue of whether the venture should be allowed in or not is never the question; it is largely confined to explaining what benefits the new industry would bring to the area, besides offering a few scraps of immediate assistance - roads, hospitals, police stations, and a tiny number of jobs for the youth - and seeking the community’s acquiescence. Also, in many cases, the fishers do not receive adequate/prior notice about the public hearings - which would frequently be held in the district headquarters - with the result that they cannot always attend the public hearing and share their views.

Other issues relating to policy coherence, highlighted in the consultations, include:

- i. The absence of space for a large number of people in the SSF category in the development policies and processes: the ‘invisible poor’ of the fisheries sector;
- ii. The ‘static’ perception of the fisheries policy-makers about the sector: the same policies, plans and programmes are in place for decades, sometimes with more or less the same budgetary provisions, with hardly a thought to the rapidly and radically changing fisheries context and the SSF needs, priorities and aspirations; even the fisheries reports (and the censuses) still retain the same archaic classification of vessels, nets and fish varieties, notwithstanding that at least some of them may no longer exist or at least be the same. Most programmes continue to work in a 1980s context that is hardly relevant - or adequate - to the present requirements. Thus, the subsidies provided for new vessels, engines, fuel and housing are reported to be so much lower than the current prices as to be worthless.

- iii. Connected to the above, there is hardly any new programme to address the emerging areas of importance to SSF: deep sea fishing, occupational health and sea safety, global and urban trade, changing market and consumer trends, climate change adaptations, migration and livelihood diversification, development-related displacement and deprivation, and fisheries management concerns. Needless to say, tenure and use rights are not even mentioned, let alone addressed.
- iv. There is no periodical monitoring of the performance of the programmes, or for watching the developments within the sector to monitor their economic, social or environmental viability and implications. The example cited here is the introduction and rapid spread of ring-seines all along the east coast, with the concerned departments hardly in a position to keep track of their implications.
- v. Finally, there are hardly any mechanisms for evaluation or impact assessment in the system, and no such studies have been carried out in the fisheries sector at any time in the last two decades to assess how the sector and the people in it have been faring and to undertake course correction wherever necessary.

Coming to institutional issues, while the national and sub-national issues in this regard have been discussed above, one cross-cutting theme in the discussions was the dwindling importance of fisheries in general, and the Department of Fisheries (DOF) in particular, in the overall policy at all levels. The dwindling resources, manpower and clout of the DOF has been remarked upon as a major weakness for the fishers to ensure that their voices are heard at the relevant policy-making and implementing platforms. It has been suggested a priority that the DOF reinvent itself and take on a more pro-active role in both addressing the fishers' needs more appropriately, adequately and more sustainably, as well as in acting as a medium to link the fishers with the larger social development and macro-economic processes. This is especially important given (i) the longstanding engagement between the communities and the DOF (with a good degree of trust that is perhaps unique) and (ii) the paucity of other champions in the government to take forward the SSF's cause.

Next in importance in the discussions is the extent to which the local fishworkers' bodies - cooperatives, and unions - are in a position to cope with the new challenges and to act as a champion for the SSF. In all coastal states, cooperatives exist in the fishing villages but their current levels of performance vary widely from place to place, with the overall perception being that they need to be reinvented to reflect their 'cooperative' nature more meaningfully.

While some local fishworker unions do exist, especially in West Bengal, a major concern relates to their affiliation to political parties and how that would reflect in their support for the cause of the fishworkers. A bigger issue may be their preoccupation with more immediate issues of concern, such as obtaining a better share in the ongoing government schemes and programmes (relating mainly to fisheries inputs and rarely to health, education and other social development agendas), which limits their capacity to take a long term perspective in which the fishers can themselves provide a blueprint for SSF development along more responsible and sustainable lines. Where fishworker organisations do exist with affiliation to national fishworker bodies, their membership tends to be small and their capacity to bring about local level change marginal. Other forms of organisations do exist in several communities, such as youth

groups, religious and cultural associations, but their agendas have little to do with fisheries.

On the issue of institutional coordination, four other actors are suggested as being necessary for more meaningful actions in implementing the SSF Guidelines: first, the **research and academic institutions** which have a great potential to (i) fill in a number of gaps in the current knowledge on every front relating to the SSF, (ii) provide a scientific backing to the demands of the SSF communities for access and use rights, responsible management and sustainable development; and (iii) lobby with the governments directly to obtain better attention to broader issues that have relevance not only for the SSF but for the wellbeing of the fisheries sector as a whole. The academic institutions can contribute significantly to the SSF Guidelines implementation process in many ways: awareness raising, training (both general and vocational), SSF-oriented academic courses and research programmes and so on. In many ways, the research and academic institutions are a vital resource that is currently least drawn upon either by the government or by the SSF communities and a strong case can be made for making them active partners in the processes.

Second, there are the **consumer bodies** who'll need to be brought into the dialogue on responsible management and sustainable development in SSF, through a food security and consumer rights perspective.

Third, it is felt that currently the **media** is not adequately briefed about the SSF issues and concerns, especially their role in responsible management of fisheries. Consequently, SSF issues are marginalised or - in relation to the coverage of conservation issues - probably paint a negative picture of the SSF impacts on conservation and sustainable use of the aquatic biodiversity. There is, it is felt, a need to bring the media more actively to engage with the SSF agendas, which is also necessary for policy-level reform processes.

Finally, the last, probably more controversial but no less important, actors who need to be considered while implementing the SSF Guidelines are the **private sector**, represented by the industries that are mushrooming along the coast. While there certainly are areas where their actions are unregulated and impacts are destructive, there is also no denying that (i) they are - in many cases - here to stay and hence need to be brought on board in order to accept their social responsibilities; and (ii) not all private sector CSR initiatives are motivated by selfish interests, and - if properly guided - can do a lot of good, especially on the social development front. With the state's interest and support for coastal community development dwindling, the private sector will continue to play a major role in defining and deciding all aspects of life and livelihoods in the SSF in some areas, and it is necessary that they be conscientised and guided to take this responsibility in a positive manner, as suggested in the SSF Guidelines (under Guiding Principles, dealing with non-state actors).

## ***2. Information, research and communication***

The important issues relating to information that came out of the consultations include:

- The paucity of information on various aspects of SSF: adequate and up-to-date information on even fundamental issues like the numbers of people, fishing equipment and infrastructure in the sector are

not always available and, when they do, reliable. As with everything else, here too, the post-harvest and other value-chain actors are hardly included in the available statistics, while little information exists on the different categories of vulnerable and marginalised groups.

- A major gap that was highlighted in all state consultations is the lack of information - or clarity - on the various development and management policies, schemes, programmes, and legislations that have a direct or indirect implication for the small-scale fisheries. The information, where it is available, is often piecemeal, with the result that the interpretation of the laws and legislations tends to depend on the person who's doing the interpretation rather than on a hard basis of fact.
- A strong assertion is made in most consultations that all important information is made available in English and, equally importantly, by being placed on the Internet. The fishers' ability to access the websites (even if a network connection is available in a remote village) and to make sense of the reports in English is hardly given a thought. The need for the information to be made available in local languages, and in a way that it is locally available, is stressed.
- Equally serious is the fact that when environmental clearances are issued to new coastal developments, the relevant documentation - though specifically mentioned in the news as being available at particular government websites - is rarely to be found at the concerned department/ministry's website.
- With the profusion of media, especially cable television networks and 24-hour news channels, the fishers complained that mis-information is as much a problem as lack of information, especially in cases of natural disasters where the shrill round-the-clock coverage of the threat, with contradictory or hyped-up visuals, actually makes the threat being seen by the fishers as trivial with ultimately serious consequences.

Coming to research in fisheries, a number of questions emerged not the least of which related to the relevance of the various research bodies and the ongoing research programmes for the fisheries sector in general and for the SSF in particular. Some concerns relating to current research include:

- The extent to which research focuses on the livelihood and social development needs of the fishers; most research is focused on the biological and technical aspects of fisheries, with socio-economic issues covered only as a marginal after-thought;
- The extent to which policymakers are supported by, or draw upon, robust research findings in their decision-making processes; the role that research plays in informing and influencing policy-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the various programmes, remains doubtful;
- One scientist shared how the research agendas of the various research bodies are fixed historically to cover certain broad areas with emphasis on biological and technical orientation. Any new idea or research proposal must, perforce, be squeezed into the fixed agendas for research or left out altogether. The extent to which the current fisheries research agendas can accommodate and give primacy to social development and other needs of the SSF remains doubtful.

- Even where important research findings exist relating, for example, to fishery resource health, potential yields in the deep sea, and implications of climate change on fisheries, such information is not readily accessible and in a way that the fishers and their organisations can make use of it either directly or for lobbying the governments to respond better in those areas.
- Research is also increasingly contentious; issues like climate change or, closer to the Indian context, the case of the culture of seaweed, *Kappaphycus* spp, in the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay, provide examples of where the research community is itself divided about the conclusions, resulting in contradictory suggestions. Similarly, promotion of ideas like cage culture do not take into account their equity implications.
- The research into value-added fishery products as a means of low-cost supplementary income generating activities for fisherwomen tend to focus entirely on the technical feasibility of the idea, ignoring the social and economic viability, with the result that a large number of women get trained in the production of these items with hardly any market potential.

There are certainly a number of very important areas where the SSF actors would require the research to look more deeply and provide them with appropriate responses. Issues such as coastal erosion are a major problem right along the coast and the measures to control it remain beyond the existing knowledge and concepts. Similarly, ideas like co-management of fisheries and sustainable livelihood diversification are suggested as areas where the research institutions can play a vital role. That most scientists working in the institutes, who attended the consultations or shared their ideas privately, are not only aware of the problems in current research but are also responsive to ideas for better engagement with the SSF communities and the ‘socio-economic issues’ needs to be built upon in implementing the SSF Guidelines. That the fishers could bring in their own experiences as well as their traditional knowledge into a research programme should be a major incentive for the professional researchers.

### **3. *Capacity development***

A number of areas where the SSF actors and the FWOs would need to increase their capacity to address the multiple challenges that they have been facing within the sub-sector as well as from the outside have already been highlighted in the foregoing sections, and some recommendations will follow in the next section, so they are not discussed here.

### **F. *Suggestions for implementing SSF Guidelines along the east coast of India***

The consultative process elicited a number of suggestions from the participants for more effective implementation of the SSF Guidelines in terms of achieving responsible management and sustainable development of small-scale fisheries. This section does not go into detailed recommendations covering the five thematic components of the SSF Guidelines because, in the body of the discussion about each of those components, some suggestions were made explicitly while many others are more implicit but can be gleaned easily, for instance, by turning the weaknesses described in the systems, processes and practices into positives. What follows is a summary of the key suggestions from the foregoing sections:

*On the need for better understanding the important categories of small-scale fishers on the east coast of India:*

- There is a clear need for better definition of the small-scale fisheries actors along the east coast of India, which incorporates all the actors along the value chains, including the supplementary and ancillary actors.
- It is suggested that a specific study be undertaken to understand the vulnerable and marginalised groups in small-scale fisheries (and beyond) in the coastal areas, with a focus on understanding and enhancing their access to the various resources necessary for sustainable livelihoods and social development.

*On customary tenure rights and governance issues:*

Given the status of the customary rights and governance systems, the concerns here relate to the options to ensure the fishers' and fishworkers' rights to the resources, i.e., the fishing grounds, the fish landing and processing sites, the fishing habitations and, not the least, the markets.

It is suggested that a study be undertaken on these issues along the following lines in the near future:

- i. Assess what provisions exist for asserting use rights (of what variety, nature and scope?) by the coastal fishing communities
- ii. Undertake a fresh exploration of the existing tenure arrangements along the coastal fisheries (from the perspective of the constitutional provisions, the SSF Guidelines, the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security);
- iii. Identify alternative institutional structures that may take the initiative to assert use rights (FWOs, cooperatives, SHGs);
- iv. Make a comparative study of how the use rights systems in other sectors (forests, water, land) work and are legalised;
- v. Assess what can be learned from the global best practices on the issue of governance of tenure; and
- vi. Explore the willingness and the opportunities within the existing policy-institutional frameworks for incorporation of governance of tenure in fisheries and a role for some customary institutions that are able to adapt and embrace the principles of the guidelines.

*On responsible management of fisheries and ecosystems*

- The need to include all value-chain actors in the management systems
- The need for management to encompass non-fisheries factors (e.g., pollution) and multiple/cross-sectoral actors in the government and non-government sectors
- Ensuring equitable stakes for all stakeholders in the management process, especially women and the vulnerable & marginalised groups

- Address the issue of compensation for losses/opportunities lost as a result of management measures, especially for the vulnerable and marginalised groups
- Re-define the role of the Department of Fisheries as a champion to forge cross-sectoral, multi-agency platforms for inclusive & consultative management processes

*On social development issues*

- On policies that already exist and can potentially address the needs of the SSF actors, undertake measures to enhance their access to the SSF through awareness raising, networking and fostering linkages with relevant government agencies
- On policies that need to be better focused and implemented, undertake programmes to raise awareness and capacity of the government staff on SSF actors and their needs, develop space for CSO participation in implementation and undertake periodical monitoring
- In areas where the communities need to change their practices - relating to sanitation, early marriages and alcohol consumption - undertake awareness programmes and support local initiatives, especially with women's SHGs and youth groups, to address the problems.
- Explore possibilities for communal toilets along the lines of Sulabh, to be managed and maintained by the women's SHGs.
- Undertake vigorous awareness campaigns - based on robust data - to raise government support for emerging issues of concern that affect the life and livelihoods of the SSF.
- Highlight the need for adequate, appropriate and accessible packages for insurance (covering life and healthcare) and pensions to cover the vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- Promote the need for better standards of sea safety and other occupational safety issues, to address both the SSF actors and the relevant government bodies, for more concerted efforts that integrate such concerns into fisheries management and development initiatives
- Assess the conditions of internal migrants, especially their inter-state movements into fisheries and non-fisheries activities, and explore appropriate actions for enhancing their working conditions and quality of life, including that of their families.

*On value chains, post-harvest and marketing*

- Increase allocations for basic infrastructure for fish landing, processing, storage, transport and marketing in SSF subsector with due attention at every level to the women's needs and opportunities.
- Post-harvest initiatives to take account of the non-technical needs such as credit to enhance the SSF actors' access to markets.

- Explore potential for the SSF actors - and their institutions - for direct involvement in export trade of fish and fishery products, giving due attention to the existing seafood trade regulations and their applicability to the SSF context.
- Give due attention to the impacts of coastal development on the fish processing activities of women and ensure that adequate alternative arrangements are in place to meet the needs of the processors adequately prior to giving new permissions.

*On gender equality*

- Undertake micro-level studies to assess the overall impact of social protection programmes on empowering the women to deal with their life and livelihoods more confidently.
- Explore the issues of women's marginalisation from fishing, fish processing and trade from the SSF Guidelines perspective and develop appropriate and adequate alternatives.
- Assess the impact of migration - by the men alone or by the family as a whole - on the women and explore options for meaningful support to them.
- The need for community-based women's organisations - self-help groups etc - to move beyond micro-credit programmes and develop more broad-based agendas for gender mainstreaming, livelihood support and social development.
- Networking between women's groups - within and beyond fisheries - to press for more comprehensive actions for empowerment.

*On disaster risks and climate change*

- The need to distinguish between the natural and the human-induced processes of change and between the fisheries and non-fisheries factors contributing to it.
- Identify the factors contributing to green house gas (GHG) emissions in the SSF sector and assess the potential for reducing them from an economic perspective for better uptake and improved performance.
- Need for more sensitive handling of disaster preparedness programmes, to ensure adequate - and gender-sensitive - provision of essentials during the evacuation phase in the rescue centres, and for integrated packages for post-disaster rehabilitation to build back better so the communities can cope with future challenges more confidently.

**G. Suggestions for policy-institutional changes required for implementation of SSF Guidelines**

Implementing most or all of the recommendations given in the foregoing sections cover a wide range of policies, legislation, processes and strategies, to be implemented by a broad category of actors, including government (national and sub-national, especially the local and district-level); civil-society organisations

(CSOs); research and academic institutions; fishworkers' organisations (FWOs), and - perhaps most significant of all - the individual SSF fishers and fishworkers themselves.

This section provides a very brief summary of the recommendations that emerged from the consultative processes and is being presented with the assumption that this is just a starting point to initiate a more inclusive consultative process to develop more concrete proposals and strategies for action in the coming period. Based on Part 3 of the SSF Guidelines, the consultations made recommendations under three broad issues of: (i) Policy Coherence, Institutional Coordination and Collaboration; (ii) Information, Research and Communication and (iii) Capacity Development. These will be discussed in the following sections.

***A. Policy Coherence, Institutional Coordination and Collaboration: some thoughts***

Given the current status of the small-scale fisheries in the macro-economic context, and the transformations that the SSF Guidelines will require bring about in the systems, the challenges to address in the policy-institutional context over the coming years are formidable. A number of critical policy changes - and their implementation - depends not so much on what is recorded and adopted on paper, but on a changed mindset of the people to deal with the issues from a human rights perspective and the chances of that happening in the short term are probably remote. But there are also several positive indicators, such as an openness to engage in participatory and consultative processes, to focus on gender equality, in acknowledging the shortcomings of the current systems and processes and so on. The interest and the willingness shown by the legislators, senior ranking fisheries officials and scientists during this consultative process to engage more closely with these processes is a strong indicator that there are good opportunities on which to build the strategies for implementing the SSF Guidelines in the coming years.

Given the duration of the consultation process, the recommendations that came out could no more than suggest a few ideas; what follows is probably a rather simplistic summary of the key recommendations on the policy-institutional front. These recommendations can be grouped under two categories, which include a few generic overarching suggestions and some more specific actions. The generic recommendations include:

- Better coherence within the policy objectives of the relevant ministries/departments working in fisheries and specifically on SSF issues, especially in relation to achieving the management and the development objectives meaningfully;
- Improved coherence between ministries/departments across sectors in policy making and implementation, with due recognition of, and representation for, SSF interests
- Improved coordination between fisheries and social development ministries (health, education, energy, etc) for integrated approaches to address the needs of SSF actors (especially the vulnerable and marginalised groups) to cope with the existing and new challenges, including management and conservation.
- Lesson learning from other sectors and other national contexts for better addressing the needs of SSF

actors

- Vertical integration of policies, legislation and implementation processes with increased emphasis on local panchayats and fishworker bodies (including all actors in the value chain) in the decision-making processes and implementation
- Need for processes involving SSF participation in the consultative processes to be really empowering and to involve all actors in the value chain.
- Review and update as necessary all policies, legislations and development programmes to address the existing and emerging needs of the SSF actors
- Undertake periodical and participatory monitoring, reviews and impact assessment of the performance of the various programmes and schemes to undertake course correction as necessary.
- Need for the DOF to reinvent itself, to address and champion the needs of the SSF in a most holistic and integrated manner, involving cross-sectoral linkages and networking with CSOs and other relevant organisations.
- Fishworker organisations - cooperatives, FWOs, and SHGs - at all levels to start a serious process of introspection and develop a new vision including a set of programmes along with innovative strategies for tackling the critical issues affecting the SSF in the Indian context. The suggestion is to undertake a participatory SWOT-analysis of the FWOs and to develop a robust programme for their institutional capacity development.
- Increased role for research and academic institutions, consumer organisations, media and private sector, through their CSR, to promote and support the SSF cause, as envisaged in the SSG Guidelines.

Coming to more specific actions, for convenience of presentation and for ease of undertaking follow-up actions, the actions suggested for policy-institutional interventions are summarised into a table, which aims to provide some indication as to the extent of engagement required at the level of policies, the institutional level at which the engagement can be most effective, the potential target groups for each level of engagement, the timeframe for each level of engagement, and the lead agencies which should take the challenge of championing the processes. The text following the table gives more detail about the different components of the table.

It is to be noted that the actions suggested need not necessarily apply to all eastern coastal states, which - given the inter-state disparities - have different kinds of institutional frameworks and - for practical reasons - may need to be prioritised for their willingness and ability to undertake institutional reform. At the sub-state level too, a certain amount of prioritisation may be necessary to identify specific districts to work in, based on the existence of 'champions' in the government, in the CSOs and in the fishworker communities themselves. The idea is to implement the suggested programmes for better policy-institutional coherence in selected locations to begin with, on an experimental basis, and - when

successful - disseminate and replicate the process elsewhere within and beyond the states.

<b>Categorisation of policies</b>	<b>Level of engagement</b>	<b>Target groups for engagement</b>	<b>Timeframe for engagement</b>	<b>Lead agencies for promotion</b>
Category I: Policies that exist and are implemented	Local	SSF actors, relevant local administration staff	Immediate (1-2 years)	CSOs and FWOs, panchayat members, SHGs, local teachers, health workers
Category II: Policies that exist but need better implementation	District-level	Distict collector & Magistrate, relevant district-level government bodies, local legislators, Panchayat representatives, Bankers	Medium term (3-5 years)	CSOs, FWOs, District Collectors, DOF and other 'champions' in the administration, donor support
Category III: Policies that don't exist or have negative impacts for SSF	State and national levels	State and Central legislators; policy think-tanks; research and academia; Media	Long term (6-10 years)	CSOs, FWOs, Fisheries Administrators, FAO, ILO and other international bodies, donor support

### *Categorisation of policies*

*NOTE:* The word 'policies' is used here for convenience as shorthand for all policies, programmes, strategies, legislations, schemes, and institutional processes, covering both fisheries livelihoods, management and development issues and social development issues.

In a nutshell, the consultations highlighted that three categories of policy engagement to be taken into account:

*Category I:* Policies that already are in place which could - if adequately and appropriately implemented and taken advantage by the target groups - address the provisions of the SSF Guidelines. This relates more to the idea that the SSF actors' understanding of the current policies is extremely weak, thereby depriving them of the opportunity to take advantage of the existing programmes of support.

*Category II:* Policies that aim to address the provisions of the SSF Guidelines, but fall short in the strategies adopted for implementation: the size, focus and coverage of the programme (the who, what, where, when, how, and why issues), accessibility to the target groups, and cross-sectoral & inter-departmental coordination; if these issues can be addressed meaningfully, the implementation of these policies can better respond to the SSF needs.

*Category III:* Policies that either do not exist to support the specific needs of the SSF or have a direct negative connotation on the life and livelihoods of the SSF. The focus for action in this area is (i) develop and implement the enabling policies that don't exist and (ii) revise the negative policies to mitigate their impacts on the SSF.

#### *Level at which to undertake institutional engagement*

The consultations have clearly indicated that there is better policy-institutional integration, coherence, collaboration and networking as one moves downwards from the national through the state, to the district and sub-district levels, with the local panchayat-level as being where the policy-institutional coherence is at its best.

The district, with the District Collector-cum-Magistrate acting as the chief coordinating officer in ensuring cross-sectoral and inter-departmental networking and cooperation, is considered the ideal level for meaningful engagement in terms of addressing the policy implementation issues. The state and the central governments, which hold the responsibility for making policies and determine the strategies for their implementation, are considered important for implementing policy-level reform as well as for wider reach and replication of successful models.

#### *Target groups for implementation*

The main target groups for the Category I actions are the SSF actors themselves and the relevant government bodies implementing the policies at the local level.

The main target groups for the Category II actions are the District Collectors and all the relevant departments that can contribute to a more cohesive, coordinated and integrated plan of action for implementing different policies at the local level. The local legislators, members of the district-level Panchayat bodies, and bankers are the other important actors in this process. The idea is that, once successful in some districts, this model framework can be replicated more widely along the coast.

The main target groups for the Category III actions are the state and national legislators, the policy thinktanks, and the media. This is considered to be a most challenging task and one that requires infinite patience, plus enormous support from a wide range of groups, from global to local and across several sectors, including private sector with its CSR support.

#### *Timeframes for policy-level engagement*

The timeframe for initiating action on Category I is considered short-term (i.e., 1-2 years) which involve undertaking ready measures such raising awareness of the community actors as well as that of the

administrations. As the policies are already in place, it is only a matter of making them better known and ensuring their implementation along planned lines.

The improved coordination in the implementation processes (Category II) at the district level and below is expected to require medium-term interventions (3-5 years) that would be necessary to raise the interest, awareness and capacity of the implementing agencies to seek for synergies and start working together, for the new processes are monitored for their effectiveness and course corrections undertaken, and finally sustainable models for replication are developed and disseminated.

The timeframe for Category III (policy reform) is considered to be long-term, 6-10 years, which is necessary to influence the government and allow sufficient momentum to be generated within the policymaking bodies to take this forward.

#### *Actors to champion the cause at the relevant forums*

In all three scenarios of intervention, the role of the Fishworker Organisations (FWOs) and the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) is obviously critical both for thinking through the ideas and the strategies and for undertaking necessary actions with support from relevant bodies: international organisations, research and academic institutions and the government departments/ministries themselves. The local panchayat leaders, SHGs, teachers and health workers are important to be involved in this process.

For the Category II interventions, alongside the CSOs and the FWOs, the Department of Fisheries (DOF) must take the lead to champion the idea within the government system. The District Collector & Magistrate is a key figure in implementing - and regularly following up - the integrated approaches, and it is essential that s/he is clearly onboard from the beginning to get the process moving forward. Donor support - both international and domestic - becomes necessary to implement and monitor the process as well as to give some leverage or 'incentive' to keep things on track.

For category III interventions, a more concerted effort that involves the FWOs, CSOs, fisheries administrators from the state and central governments, research bodies, international organisations like FAO and ILO, and donors is necessary. The media may be sufficiently briefed to act as a champion of the proposed policy-legislative reforms.

#### ***B. Information, Research and Communication***

The consultations suggested a number of actions under this category which included:

- Carrying out fresh assessments of the SSF context to provide up-to-date, adequate, relevant, accessible, user-friendly information on various aspects of the SSF actors' life, livelihoods and social development needs;
- Undertaking detailed studies on various existing and emerging issues of concern to small-scale fisheries, especially relating to the vulnerable and marginalised communities, with emphasis on making sense of these issues from their perspective and on robust and practical policy

recommendations;

- Highlighting the need for formal research programmes to understand and - where appropriate - incorporate the indigenous knowledge of the SSF communities, and to make provision for the SSF participation in research and facilitate two-way learning processes.
- Implementing pilot-scale activities to assess the validity of assumptions behind such issues as co-management and use rights approaches; and
- Developing appropriate channels for dissemination of user-friendly, reliable and timely information.

### ***C. Capacity Development***

- Currently, the institutional capacity of the Fishworkers Organisations to take forward the SSF agendas, and lobby for their effective implementation at the relevant levels, remains very weak. There is need for more capacity development not only on the provisions of the SSF Guidelines, but also on (i) the strategies to implement them and (ii) the actions necessary to get support from all other relevant bodies - especially the government - in the implementation process.
- Capacity development programmes need to go beyond providing mere training; the need for forward and backward linkages, investments, market access, financial and personnel administration, and hand-holding must be realised and incorporated into the programmes; all support must be provided in an integrated manner, and not in a piecemeal fashion spread over long periods as frequently happens.
- The investments in training on alternative income generating activities for SSF actors - which has been a recurring theme for a long time now - have proven to be largely wasteful; it is necessary to give a serious thought to either improve their performance - post-training - or move on to better things.
- Capacity development needs to focus not just on the SSF actors , but also on the relevant institutional actors in the government, research organisations and CSOs, whose understanding of the SSF context, as well as the need for integrated, socially-oriented, interventions, requires to be enhanced significantly.
- Awareness raising and capacity building need to extend their focus beyond the women: gender mainstreaming needs men to be trained as much as - if not more than - women. Also, in the overall context characterising life and livelihoods in SSF, the men are frequently as much a victim as the women and suffer as badly, so there is need for specific capacity development components to enhance their coping strategies and wellbeing.
- Also important in terms of coverage of the capacity building programmes are the vulnerable and marginalised groups; need to identify who these are, develop specific programmes to enhance their capacities in a real sense and implement these programmes, making adequate provision for follow-up support and hand-holding.

- Academic curricula need to focus on the specific needs of the students from the fishing communities and provide need-based education that aims to fulfil the aspirations of the SSF students in terms of better fishing techniques, fisheries management, supplementary livelihood opportunities, livelihood diversification, and institutional capacity development.
- Organising exposure programmes for all Central and State-level fisheries administrators to the SSF communities for extended periods of stay to observe the local livelihoods and quality of life from the local perspective is suggested as a very important capacity development initiative.

## H. Annexures

### *Annexure 1: Structure of the state consultations*

#### *1. Agenda for the 2-day consultation*

Date/Time	Agenda
<b>Day 1</b>	
12:00-13:00	Registration, lunch
13:00-13:15	Welcome remarks, self-introductions
13:15-13:45	Introduction to the consultation  Presentation: Introducing SSF Guidelines  <i>Objectives, nature, scope and guiding principles</i>
13:45-14:15	Open discussion: Who constitute SSF in the state?  <i>Identifying small-scale fishers and fishworkers in the fisheries value chain in the state including the roles of men and women; identification of vulnerable and marginal groups</i>
14:15-14:45	Presentation: Content of the SSF Guidelines  <i>The provisions under the five broad components</i>
14:45-15:00	Formation of groups and explanation of group tasks
15:00-16:45	Group Discussion I: SSF Guidelines in the local context  <i>Assessing the relevance and applicability of the different components of SSF guidelines in the state's context</i>
16:45-17:30	Group presentations and summing up
<b>Day 2</b>	
09:00-09:15	Recap of Day I consultation
09:15-9:45	Open discussion: Prioritisation of 4-5 key issues relevant to the state's fisheries context (in terms of life, livelihoods and social development) in the implementation of the SSF guidelines
9:45-11:00	Group Discussion II:

	<p>A. Identifying gaps in the broader policy-institutional context (at different levels and covering different actors, including the communities) in addressing the key issues</p> <p>B. Assessing options to address the issues through better policy-institutional context, information and research, and community capacity- and institutional strengthening</p>
11:00-11:30	Group presentations
11:30-12:30	<p>Panel Discussion: Ways forward</p> <p><i>Actions for addressing key issues through improved implementation of SSF Guidelines</i></p> <p><i>Roles &amp; responsibilities of different actors (community, government, CSOs &amp; FWOs)</i></p>
<b>12:30 - 13:30</b>	<b>Summary and conclusions from the consultation</b>

## 2. Agenda for the 1-day consultation

<b>Date/Time</b>	<b>Agenda</b>
10:00-10:30	Registration, welcome remarks
10:30-11:00	<p>Introduction to the consultation</p> <p>Presentation: Introducing SSF Guidelines</p> <p><i>Objectives, nature, scope and guiding principles</i></p>
11:00-11:30	<p>Open discussion: Who constitute SSF in the state?</p> <p><i>Identifying small-scale fishers and fishworkers in the fisheries value chain in the state including the roles of men and women; identification of vulnerable and marginal groups</i></p>
11:30-12:00	<p>Presentation: Content of the SSF Guidelines</p> <p><i>The provisions under the five broad components</i></p>
12:00-12:15	Formation of groups and explanation of group tasks
12:00-14:00	<p>Group Discussion I: SSF Guidelines in the local context</p> <p><i>Assessing the relevance and applicability of the different components of SSF guidelines in the state's context</i></p>
13:00-14:00	Lunch (Group discussions to continue over lunch)
14:00-14:30	Group presentations

14:30-15:00	Open discussion: Prioritisation of 4-5 key issues relevant to the state's fisheries context (in terms of life, livelihoods and social development) in the implementation of the SSF guidelines
15:00-16:00	Group Discussion II:  Identifying gaps in the broader policy-institutional context (at different levels and covering different actors, including the communities) in addressing the key issues
16:00-16:30	Group presentations
16:30-17:30	Panel Discussion: Ways forward  <i>Actions (better policy-institutional coherence, collaboration &amp; networking, information and research, and capacity building) for improved implementation of SSF Guidelines concerning selected actions</i>  <i>Roles &amp; responsibilities of different actors (community, government, CSOs &amp; FWOs)</i>

***Annexure 2: Questionnaire used for group discussions in state consultations***

**Questionnaire: SSF Guidelines**

1. *Please go through the questionnaire prior to attending the consultation, focusing on the relevance and importance of each of the questions to your local context.*
2. *The questions are indicative, you are free to add, revise or modify them to suit your local context.*
3. *For all questions, give special emphasis to: women and vulnerable and marginalised groups, including:*
  - a) *female-headed households (especially single women/widows),*
  - b) *older people,*
  - c) *subsistence fishers (the poor who fish with gear but with or without craft and any intention to sell) and fishworkers,*
  - d) *labourers (those paid in wages or share of the catch),*
  - e) *children (below the age of 16),*
  - f) *tribals,*
  - g) *migrants (those coming from other States),*
  - h) *inhabitants of remote locations,*
  - i) *disaster/erosion prone communities,*
  - j) *development-displaced groups,*
  - k) *ancillary and supplementary service providers, and*
  - l) *any other considered as needing protection by the community.*

### **I. A. Governance of tenure:**

1. What systems of customary tenure - traditional rights exercised, individually or collectively, written or unwritten - exist in your area?
  - a) *Access and use of the coast (for housing; for community use; for water supply and sanitation; for storing craft, gear, sail/engine; for landing craft and catch; and for processing fish etc.), including boundary demarcations on land*
  - b) *Access and use of fishing gear, fishing grounds, and designated species etc, including rule systems demarcating fishing areas at sea (beachseines, gillnets), in creeks and backwaters*
  - c) *Access to other natural resources in the area - mangroves, shells, beaches, backwaters...*
2. Please indicate how the women and the vulnerable and marginalised people are covered in the customary tenure arrangements.
3. What changes have affected the customary tenure rights? Explain.
  - a) *Government policies and legislations - formal panchayats, marine police, new ports and harbours...*
  - b) *Competition from within fisheries- new/increased SSF categories, mechanised/industrial fisheries...*
  - c) *Competition from other sectors - industries, spread of urban areas, oil exploration...*
  - d) *Conservation activities - protected areas, species, mangrove plantations etc.*
  - e) *Natural processes - erosion, siltation, natural disasters, climate change...*
  - f) *Changing community norms*
  - g) *Individuals/communities relinquishing (or reasserting) rights*
4. What are the implications of changing customary tenure arrangements for the SSF? (uncertain use rights to fishing grounds, land, houses, infrastructure, other resources on which the communities depended on for life and livelihoods...)
5. Highlight the impacts on women, vulnerable and marginalised groups of such changes.
6. Are there any support systems, policies and packages to help the affected people to cope with the changed conditions? Who by? How adequate, appropriate and equitable?
7. What, in your opinion, can be done to support the small-scale fishing communities and their organisations to cope with the weakening rights to the land and the sea? Please suggest specific actions in the immediate-, medium-, and long-term for the government, the CSOs and the communities themselves.

## I. B. Sustainable resource management

**Resource management means managing fisheries in the local context covering at least 7 questions and their corollaries: Who to fish? What to fish? Where to fish? When to fish? How to fish? How long to fish? How much to fish?**

1. Do the customary management systems (panchayats, village elders...) in your area take decisions relating to fisheries, including fishing?
8. What are the major fisheries-related functions, or arrangements, of the customary systems?
  - a) *Resolving gear and boundary conflicts,*
  - b) *Scheduling of fishing activities, launching/landing boats, sequencing gear use,*
  - c) *Auctioning/sale of fish catch, managing right of first sale/right of first offer*
  - d) *Owner-crew relations,*
  - e) *Fishing holidays and bans*
  - f) *Controlling destructive fishing, new fishing crafts and gears etc.*
  - g) *Managing use of community land for: drying fish, nets, access to credit/market, mediation with government...*
2. Do these cover the activities of women and of other vulnerable and marginalised groups in the fisheries?
3. How are the decisions of customary management systems/arrangements implemented and complied with (i.e., enforced)? How effective are they?
4. What are the government-implemented management measures in your area? (MCS systems, fishing zones, mesh size regulations, destructive fishing, seasonal bans...)
5. How well do you understand the provisions of legislations like CRZ Notification, MFR Act, etc to ensure that they are being implemented in the right spirit?
6. Are there many socially-sanctioned illegal, excessive and/or destructive fishing activities taking place in your area and how are these being addressed?
7. How are the government-led management measures implemented and how effective are they? Do SSF participate in their implementation?
8. Is there scope for SSF communities to contribute to, and improve, the government-led management systems? How and where in the management process do they fit?
9. Is there a need for strengthening organizations such as associations, cooperatives, in fisheries, etc? Please suggest specific actions in the immediate-, medium-, and long-term for the government, the CSOs and the fishing communities.

## **II. Social development, employment and decent work**

1. What are the social protection schemes in your area under the Centre, the state and the panchayat, including for women, migrants, older people and other vulnerable and marginalised groups, in the realms of education, health, sanitation, water supply, women and children, workers, etc? How appropriate, accessible and adequate are they?
2. Do you see the need for greater coherence between different agencies providing social protection? At what level (national, state, local) and how can this be achieved?
3. Do the current social protection schemes cover all actors in the value chains, i.e., fishers, processors, traders at different levels, fishworkers, ancillary workers and migrants? Are there any groups that are left out?
4. Which are the government agencies responsible for these social protection schemes for fishers, fishworkers and fishing communities?
5. Are fishing communities in your area more disadvantaged than the neighbouring (non-fishing) communities in terms of education, health, housing, water and sanitation? If so, why? Give reasons.
6. What social protection measures cover the SSF actors in the value chain (including women, migrants, older people and other vulnerable and marginalised groups)? How accessible, adequate and appropriate are they?
7. What insurance systems exist to cater to the needs of SSF actors? Please focus on the elderly, differently abled, single women/widows, destitute and shore-based value-chain actors.
8. What are the critical issues related to sea safety, safe work and occupational health in your fisheries? How (well) are these covered in the social support systems?
9. Is migration (permanent, seasonal and occasional) into other areas for fishing, fish processing and other activities (mention which) an important livelihood strategy in your area? If so, what are the main migratory pathways? What, in your view are the rights of the migrants? Are there any programmes to support the migrants (while being hired, while settling in a new area, and in protecting their rights at work)?
10. What are the issues related to sea safety, safe work conditions, occupational health and insurance of fishers and fishworkers (i) migrating from your area to elsewhere and (ii) migrating from elsewhere to work in your area?

### **III. Value chains, post-harvest and trade**

1. Are the small-scale post-harvest actors (fish processors and traders) represented in the local decision-making processes relating to fisheries?
2. Do the post-harvest actors have organizations to support their activities and represent their needs at the relevant platforms?
3. Do the post-harvest actors receive government support with institutional and capacity development and strengthening to produce good quality fish and fishery products for both domestic and export markets? How can this support be strengthened?
4. Are the infrastructure, amenities and services at the landing centres, processing and storage areas and markets appropriate, adequate and accessible to cover the business-related and personal needs of the fish processors and traders, especially women?
5. Are there significant losses (nutritional, quality- and income-related) in fish supply chains and/or waste of inputs (water, fuelwood, ice etc) that add to the costs of the processors/traders and reduce their incomes? Can these be addressed through local cost-efficient technologies? Give examples.
6. What varieties of fish and fishery products from your area are sent to national, regional and international markets? What are the major constraints for supplying to these markets and how can these be addressed?
7. What are the major constraints to supplying to the international trade and how do you address them? Do you receive any assistance from the government - in terms of knowledge, training, technical and financial assistance, market support - in this?
8. What impacts does the export trade have on the local food security (for the poorer consumers in particular) and on the fish resources (in terms of over-exploitation)? Are any measures in place to address these concerns?
9. What are the benefits for the different small-scale actors from the export supply chains? Are there any specific categories of people whose livelihoods are adversely affected owing to export trade?
10. Do the SSF actors have access to timely and adequate market information to help earn better returns?

#### IV. Gender equality

1. What are the constraints for women's equitable participation in decision-making processes in their life and fisheries-based livelihoods? How are these being addressed?
2. What have been the impacts of the changes in the sector on the livelihoods of women?
  - a) *Access to fish - for catching, sale and for domestic consumption*
  - b) *Access to other common property resources - firewood, grazing lands, shell collection etc.*
  - c) *Competition from within and outside fisheries - new value chains, new intermediaries, more investments and distant markets*
  - d) *Space on the beach, at home and in markets*
  - e) *Information, knowledge and capacity to address changes*
  - f) *Access to credit, infrastructure and transportation*
3. What role do the women play in customary governance systems? Focus especially on female-headed households, single-women/widows and women of a non-fishing caste background.
  - a) *Access to landed fish and processing infrastructure*
  - b) *Access to property (common property and private property)*
  - c) *Right to mobility - outside fisheries and outside the local area*
  - d) *Decision-making at the household level - children's education etc.*
  - e) *Participation in Panchayati Raj and other local governance systems*
4. What social protection programmes and schemes exist to enhance the role and status of women in the fishery and in social domains? How effective are they?
5. What women's organisations exist in the communities to provide support in their activities and to highlight their needs and aspirations at relevant platforms? How effective have these been?
6. What policies need to be formulated to enhance women's role, status and contribution in fisheries and in the fishing/domestic spheres?
7. How can women's role in decision-making processes - at the community level and in the formal programmes - be enhanced to ensure their equitable participation? Please suggest specific actions in the immediate-, medium-, and long-term for the government, the CSOs and the fishing communities.

## V. Disaster risks and climate change

1. What impacts do climate events have on the sea, the fisheries (including fish processing and trade), your fishing activities and habitations?
  - a) *Sea level rise*
  - b) *Currents, winds, wave patterns...*
  - c) *Seasonality and inter-seasonal variations*
  - d) *Rainfall*
  - e) *Changes in availability/behaviour/breeding patterns of fish*
  - f) *Natural disasters etc.*
2. Are the climate events, in your view, related to any human actions? Between the natural and the human-induced changes, which are more significant?
  - g) *Development activities and pollution*
  - h) *Upstream changes*
  - i) *Fisheries' related causes*
3. How can we reduce the human contribution to extreme climate events? Are there options to reduce the use of energy in the SSF activities (all along the value chain)?
4. What systems are in place to help SSF actors to adapt to climate events such as cyclones?
5. Are the current disaster preparedness, mitigation and adaptation processes adequate to help the SSF actors to address the threats posed by natural disasters confidently and equitably?
6. How can the existing disaster preparedness and post-disaster response systems be improved to help build back better and ensure confident responses to future threats from the SSF actors?
7. What kind of capacity building is needed at the SSF communities level for better adaptation and mitigation of the climate events and natural disasters? Please suggest specific actions in the immediate-, medium-, and long-term for the government, the CSOs and the fishing communities.

## **VI. Implementing SSF Guidelines: policies, institutions, information, research and capacity building**

1. What are the different government agencies (beyond fisheries) at the national, state and local levels that influence the SSF livelihoods, food security and poverty eradication issues? Please provide a list of specific programmes being implemented by different departments and agencies.
  - a) *Forestry*
  - b) *Rural Development*
  - c) *Panchayati Raj*
  - d) *Revenue*
  - e) *Health*
  - f) *Education*
  - g) *Civil Supplies etc.*
2. In your opinion, are the policies and programmes of different government agencies well coordinated and work together towards common objectives? Is there need for better coherence and coordination in implementation?
  - a) *Horizontal integration: Development/conservation objectives vs livelihood support programmes; focus on the inter-linkages between education, health, water supply, rural infrastructure, power, land, housing, etc at the horizontal level*
  - b) *Vertical linkages: fishing, fish processing, marketing programmes, undertaken by the state and central government and the need for better coherence and integration between the central, state and local policies and implementation*
  - c) *Consultative and participatory programming and implementation: Space for local institutions (formal and informal) in the decision-making and implementation processes - please specify at what level these exist.*
3. What can be done to develop more (vertically and horizontally) coherent policies and programmes at different levels?
  - a) *Fishworker associations being involved in decision-making at the panchayat level and at the district level (and higher wherever possible)*
  - b) *Fishworker associations providing ideas for better collaboration between different agencies*
  - c) *Fishworker associations taking responsibility for implementing some of the programmes in collaboration with the government and other like-minded organisations working on fisheries, food security and poverty eradication etc.*

4. Do you see a need for fisheries associations and networks to link better with one another as well as with other, non-fisheries, organisations working on food security and poverty eradication issues? Please provide examples of such networks and how these can be developed.
5. What are the main channels of information relating to fisheries activities, value-chains, social support programmes and natural disasters? How efficient are they?
6. How important do you think is the research - fisheries and social science related - undertaken by research, academic and other institutions in influencing policies affecting SSF livelihoods? How can the research be improved to reflect the needs of the fishers and fishworkers in the policy-making processes?
7. What capacity development programmes have been implemented and how effective are they? Can you suggest ways and means to improve the quality of the capacity building programmes and areas where you think the SSF communities' capacity needs to be developed further?





Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand are working together through the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) Project to lay the foundations for a coordinated programme of action designed to better the lives of the coastal populations through improved regional management of the Bay of Bengal environment and its fisheries.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is the implementing agency for the BOBLME Project.

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For more information, please visit [www.boblme.org](http://www.boblme.org)



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