Fishing Communities of India

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Marine Fishing communities of India

- Fishing has its origins in humankind’s hunter gatherer stage of life—predates settled agriculture
- Marine fishing is practiced over centuries over a 12,000 km coast line (India, Pak, B’desh, Sri Lanka)
- It is a predominantly a caste based occupation with around 3-4 castes specialising in marine fishing in each maritime state/province.
- Marine fishing castes and their status in Indian society—difference with agrarian castes and tribal groups
- Self governing communities with strong traditional structures for internal governance
- Importance of markets, a community with great adaptability to markets, hunter-gatherers integrated with global markets
Fish resources, fishing technology

- Fishing left to genius of fishermen till independence
- Wide range of fishing technologies evolved over centuries to suit local conditions
- Gender division of labour—important role for women
Factors that shaped the marine fishing communities

- Ecological factors (basically “nature”)
- Market factors
- Social factors (caste, religion)
- Political factors (policies of the State, partition, war, etc.)
Mostly about India.....
Post independence changes

- Planned development: perception of traditional fishing as primitive and requiring “modern technology”
- Planned development based on introduction of mechanised boats and increased investments which at no stage considered limits to exploitation of natural resources
Post independence changes 2

• Introduction of coastal trawlers leads to trawl and non-trawl dichotomy, especially in the south west and south east zones

• Harbours and trawlers open fisheries sector for outsiders and capitalistic growth; a window for “open access”

• Introduction of “deep sea” vessels creates new divide

• Artisanal boats respond to loss of catch by motorising and expanding area of operation
Post independence changes 3

• New boat types and gear types enter artisanal sector

• Ring seine and mini trawls enter south west zone leading to over capacity of artisanal sector and change eco-friendly nature of artisanal sector

• Conflicts between trawl and artisanal sector leads to MFRAs in the states with exclusive artisanal zone and set of regulations; however poor implementation

• Decline/destruction of traditional mgmt systems
Estimated marine fish landings in India

Phase-I

Phase-II

Phase-III

Landings (million tonnes)
The current scenario

- Resources in coastal waters fully or over exploited
- Expansion to deeper waters possible but can only provide alternative niche for a miniscule part of fleet
- 3 sectors with permanent conflict of interests: artisanal, small and medium trawl sector and a small “deep sea” fleet
The current scenario

• Resources in coastal waters fully or over exploited
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• Odd men out: Kanyakumari shark fleet, mechanised gill netters
Current Scenario 3

- A large number of regulations exist; traditional rules still hold in many places; interesting social mechanism to cope with declining employment opportunities

- However no “management” whatsoever. Perhaps largest fishery in the world without a management plan!
Environment Vs. Livelihood—the new conflict

- Till 2000 struggle for livelihood protection was also pro-environment
- Now exclusive environmental concerns dominate the discourse
- Shark ban of 2001
- Turtle protection in Orissa
- Sea cucumber ban
- MoEF’s contradictory and dictatorial policies
- MPAs—the new threat
Coastal environment and fishing communities

- Coastal environment crucial for fishing communities
- It is the place where they live and depend on coastal space and resources for their life
- It also contains resources and processes that affect the marine eco-system and their livelihood
- Hence both life and livelihood of fishing communities depend on the health of the coast
• 6000 km coastline
• If each village occupies 1 km of coastline, then over 3000 km of coastline occupied by fishermen villages—over 50%
• Fisherfolk most important stakeholder on coast
• This reality is not being recognised by policy makers and no reference is made to fishing communities in the cmz concept note
• The CRZ/CMZ struggle is therefore a life and death struggle to establish the importance of fishing communities on the coast
Threats to coastal space and eco-system

- Gradual and incremental exploitation of the coast over a long time
- Till recently, problems more associated with major cities on the coast
- Now rapid economic growth—enormous pressure on the coastal space and coastal resources
- Pressures from industrialisation, port infrastructure, tourism, coastal aquaculture, expansion of urban areas, mining
• Inter-sectoral conflicts on the increase
• The agri-sector—fisheries sector conflicts:
  – Dams, irrigation schemes
  – River linking scheme
  – 30% reduction in nutrient flow to the sea due to dams in 50%
• Examples from Gujarat: Adani port, Kalpasar project
Shore protection related issues

- Myth of the sea-wall
- Localised shore line protection and its limitations
- Need for macro level planning and use of multiple measures (engineering and non engineering) to protect coast
Climate change

- Global warming and sea level increase
- Sea level increase and safety of the coast
- Increases in rainfall variations
- Increase in sea surface temperature—the case of the oil sardine
- Acidification of the sea and threats arising from that
Coastal Regulations

- The 1980s
- The CRZ of 1991
- 1991-2004
- The idea of CMZ
- Anti-CMZ campaign
- The new CRZ 2011
- Current status
Thanks