



Stories from the field



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India

Possible approaches in Community Based Fisheries Management Two initiatives in South India

Over the years, there has been a growing realisation among fisher folks that things were going wrong. They learnt it the hard way when dwindling catches and declining catch quality started affecting their livelihoods. But the 2004 tsunami disaster brought to light some of the pertinent resources issues that were hitherto neglected, and created an environment conducive of addressing the problems that have been pulling the sector down.

As many other nations, India too is challenged to improve fisheries management in spite of having relevant policies. Indeed, most of the time policies, regulations and management measures - such as zone regulations, mesh regulations, seasonal regulations etc. - are often formulated in a top down fashion and with limited stakeholder participation. As a result, adherence to the regulations has been poor, and the integrated nature of

'management', 'livelihoods' and 'development' is not well understood.

As part of the fisheries livelihoods activities under the UN tsunami recovery support programme, FAO partnered with the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS) to attempt pilot trials on community based fisheries management.

SIFFS identified the Nagapatinam coast in Tamil Nadu and the Alapad Village along Kerala coast for these trials - two areas where SIFFS had already been working with traditional fishers panchayat as well as elected panchayat leaders under the Panchyarth raj system, and had established traditional fisher marketing cooperatives in Nagapatinam.

Nagai experiment

During the post tsunami period the Coromandal coast, including

Photo: Ring seine operation in Alapad

Nagapatinam, was facing problems with over-capacity of motorised boats and competition from increasing mechanised boats, the introduction of large ring seine nets and expanding pair trawling operations.

During in-depth consultations with village leaders, SIFFS realised that fisheries management and related issues needed to be addressed collectively, and consensus was reached on the establishment of a 21 member Nagai Karai Fisheries Management Council. The council selected 12 villages to be represented in a management committee which was charged with undertaking fisheries management debates, advocacy for fishers welfare, and reaching consensus decisions.

Alapad experiment

The 17 km coast of Alapad village was plied by too many high investment ring seiners (60 foot and above with powerful out board or in board engines), each operated by 40 to 60 fishers. This was an unsustainable and uneconomic situation and SIFFS found the elected Panchayat an effective institution for change: the panchayats president along with 9 traditional institutions, Karayogams, discussed the issue and decided to constitute a democratic forum. As a result, the Fisheries Management Council Alapad (FIMACA) was inaugurated in December 2009.

The council took a series of bold decisions such as no more increase in the number of ring seine boats operating from the village; the ring seiners were to be replaced only by smaller boats; a ban on night fishing; and a reduction in the number of trips by ring seiners to one per day.

Results

The Nagai and Alapad interventions resulted in micro-level initiatives of community based fisheries management. With added encouragement, the new institutions continued their functions and maintained democratic processes with horizontal and vertical initiatives to implement decisions.

From there onwards, community-based management need to be spread further across other villages and districts, and allow building up district and state level council federations, fully involving the government in the process to build up true fisheries co-management.

This process proved the importance of addressing local problems and working through local institutions suited to the fishers.

The follow-up Fisheries Management for Sustainable Livelihoods project (FIMSUL) initiated by the government with FAO support, will further build upon the previous achievement, this time in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry.

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