

## **INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM FOR COEXISTENCE BETWEEN ARTISANAL FISHERS AND COASTAL ENVIRONMENT**

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One of the important factors responsible for livelihood insecurity in India is that, people most often behave as enemies of the environment, without consideration for a balanced and trustful interaction with their environment making future livelihood uncertain and the life sustaining environment unsure. Therefore it is paramount that coastal communities develop an understanding to coexist with the coastal environment, appreciating its biological, social, ecological and economic advantages for their own sake and for their children.

PREPARE an NGO has initiated a strategy for coexistence amongst the artisanal fishers to manage coastal resources in a democratic and just manner by revitalizing traditional institutions. Learning their systems and values PREPARE has reasons to believe that artisanal fishers neither negatively exploit the environment nor are enemies of the environment as propagated by vested interests. Infact it is the impoverished artisanal fishers who defend and conserve the coastal environment on which they are dependent with the sole aim to secure their existence.

The principal building block of the coexistence strategy of PREPARE is by creating an awakening traditional institutional conscience of artisanal fishers so as to claim and use their customary prerogative over coastal environment. The education based awakening is done by a process of recalling past cultural heritage and collective values of their community institution and relating the same to their present cultural expressions which are almost found synomimous. Their values invariably hold a spiritual respect for the coast and reflect integrity of their environment. This process of awakening and empowerment has led to reinstitutionalise their collective wisdom for actions such as afforestation, reforestation and shelter belts. These empowered fishers are also able to resist the destructions brought to the coast by developers and stoutly defend their coastal wealth which is organically linked to their community life. To pursue a just policy for conserving and managing their coastal resources, they have joined hands with the Govt. as joint managers of the coastal wealth.

Interestingly the institutions of artisanal fishers follow different systems in different villages for sharing goods and services derived from the coastal resources the various systems followed is dependent on the type of local flora and fauna, local ecosystem services and the social character of the community groups. Their systems not only enable them to meet individual, family and community needs equitably but also prescribes, roles and responsibilities for different actors within the community for maintenance, protection and management of the resource including quantum of punishments for non performance of responsibilities.

This coexistence strategy has a demonstrative effect as it respects the cultural landscape of communities as well as the integrity of the coastal environment. The coexistence strategy of PREPARE is also pluralistic and therefore is opposed to straight jacket, uniform, lenior pattern for managing coastal resources. PREPARE advocates pluralistic coexistence at the local level and a convergence at macro and external levels to promote conservation and management of coastal resources so as to protect human life and nature life.