

Hemmed In by Development

A study of five fishing villages in Goa, India, shows how development in the region increasingly marginalizes local communities and deprives them of sources of livelihood

Odxel, Cacara, Nauxi, Bambolim and Siridao are small fishing villages running from north to south along the western coast of Tiswadi *taluka* (an administrative district for taxation purposes) of the Indian state of Goa. They lie on the banks of the Zuari river, which, at 92 km in length, is the largest river in the state. (The port city of Vasco da Gama lies on the mouth of the Zuari river.) Panjim, the state capital, is just 5-10 km away, and the Goa University, part of which was built on land acquired from the local community, was set up in 1984.

in the state a few km away, and the capital city so close, it would seem that these communities are poised for success. Unfortunately, this prime location has, over the years, been a coveted resource for other groups as well, forcing these communities to fight for their traditional rights, with their livelihoods and survival increasingly under threat.

In the early 1980s—by which time fishing had become the main source of income for the community—the University started buying the agricultural and farm lands on which these communities traditionally grew crops—paddy, ragi, vegetables—for four months of the year. Apart from this, there were cashew plantations that provided the famed ‘*feni*’ (local alcohol brew) of Goa. Taking advantage of the illiteracy of the Gaudas, the customary rights to these lands were gradually taken away by private owners, though the community continued cultivating the lands under lease agreements, without staking their claims as tenants.

Once the University started to acquire the lands, these owners sold some of their lands to the University. The University, spread over 427.49 acres, is built on what was earlier Cacara land, but is now called the Taleigao plateau. The University also got government land. The local people, not being registered as tenants, got no compensation but were promised jobs at the university instead.

Supplementary income

Today, several women from the fishing community supplement the family income by working as housemaids in the homes of the University staff. A few inhabitants have got jobs in the university. Following the

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These villages have a total population of about 3,300 inhabitants. The villages are mainly inhabited by the Gauda community, classified as Scheduled Tribe. The community was traditionally involved in farming and toddy tapping, with fishing being a supplementary source of income until the 1970s. After this period, with the introduction of ‘disco nets’ (synthetic gillnets) and the consequent increase in income, the communities started identifying themselves as fishers, with fishing contributing to a larger proportion of their income as compared to previous years. Agricultural lands being taken over in subsequent years further sealed their ‘identity’ as fishers.

With the Zuari river on one side, the state’s highest seat of learning on the other, the only tertiary care hospital

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acquisition of the land by the university, one source of livelihood of these communities was destroyed forever. (Siridao, though, has been an exception since for over a generation there has been migration from the village to the UK and France, courtesy the Portuguese passports that Goans can use to migrate to the European region. Several people have bought trawlers, and fishing away from the Zuari river.)

In 1997, one of the big mining families of Goa, bought huge tracts of land adjoining Cacra with plans to start a project worth over Rs300 crore. This project involved the building of a large ramp, which would have blocked the canoes from going out into the river. The fishing communities protested and the project was stalled. Later, in 2008, the mega project entered into a fresh controversy over watering of the landscaping, which villagers stated was part of the project and which came under a no-development zone. However, the land is still owned by the Timblos and the community lives in the constant fear that permissions could be given at any time for them to 'restart' their project. Sanjay Pereira, the *panch* (village head) of Cacra ward for the Santa Cruz *panchayat*, says this project, if passed, will destroy the livelihoods of the community by preventing them from fishing.

There are also large residential houses and hotels which have come up in the area, despite constant protests by the villagers at the *Gram Sabha* meetings and at the relevant government offices. The increasing pressure on land has made the community feel insecure. While the fishing communities are not too worried about losing the land on which their houses are built being taken away (since they have documentation that guarantees security of tenure and since they belong to the Scheduled Tribes), they are unable to renovate or expand in accordance with their needs. Sanjay Pereira explains his own situation; being one of four brothers, they wanted to build two extra rooms adjoining their house, as the family is expanding. Two years ago

a case was filed against them alleging that the expansion violated Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) rules, even though the CRZ Notification of 2011 permits construction/reconstruction of dwelling units of traditional coastal communities, especially fisherfolk, within 100 to 200 m of the no-development buffer zone (NDZ).

Sanjay points out the permissions given for building bungalows and hotels that are even closer to the river banks and clearly in violation of CRZ rules. When complaints are made against these constructions, the authorities interpret the rules to show how these are within permissible limits. Recent developments may make it easier for the communities to renovate or expand their houses, with the Ministry for Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) planning to amend the CRZ Notification by reducing the NDZ to a mere 50 m, ostensibly in the interests of the traditional fishing communities. The latter are, however, strongly opposing this move, claiming that dilution of CRZ norms will pave the way for the hotel industry and building lobbies to capture even more of the coast than they already have. "This amendment is planned to protect and encourage the interest of the hotel mafia," Olencio Simoes, Secretary of the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF) and the joint general secretary of Goenchea Ramponkarancha Ekvott (GRE), alleged in a press statement.

Further, even if the communities have rights to the land, if they are unable to sustain livelihoods due to pressures from all sides, they will be forced to look for alternatives, possibly finally having to move out of the area.

As a direct result of the restrictions on expanding their houses, one of the big problems faced

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A dugout canoe fisherman from a tribal community in Cacra, India, inspecting his fishing net

mainly by women and girls is the lack of toilets in the area. The homes are too small to allow construction of toilets, though about 20 per cent of houses in all these villages have managed to build these. The community has been requesting the government to build public toilets and has also identified three sites for these. Prior to elections, promises are made by candidates, but nothing is done once the elections are over. With men going out fishing early

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in the mornings, it is very difficult for women to find private spaces to relieve themselves. Girls tend to use the public toilets in schools.

There are a total of about 70 canoes of 6 m length and about 100 canoes of 8 m length fitted with outboard motors (OBMs) owned by these five fishing villages. The smaller canoes are involved in hook-and-line fishing and make three-hour trips, while the larger canoes go out for about an hour-and-a-half and use gillnets.

Subsidies are available for the fishing communities—Rs.36,000 per year for petrol, Rs. 60,000 for five years for OBMs, Rs. 30,000 for five years for gillnets and Rs.60,000 for a new canoe if registered as a fisherman. Apart from these, the fishermen are entitled to insurance schemes, financial assistance for house renovation and interest subsidies on certain loans.

The fishing ban of two months in the year during the monsoon (1 June to 31 July) does not apply to these fishermen, as non-motorized canoes and motorized canoes fitted with up to 10HP OBMs and using gillnets are exempted from this ban. However, in any case, these communities do not fish much in this season, largely due to the weather.

Fishing is a family occupation and, unlike in the larger fishing vessels,

no migrant labour is employed in these villages. Once men come in with the catch, the women transport it via public buses to Panjim where they sell the catch to wholesalers. This is because they do not have space to sit in the Panjim fish market, as the spaces are allotted to women from different villages of Goa. Still, the women from these communities prefer this system as they are able to negotiate with the wholesalers and they are assured of selling their entire catch. They say that even though the price is lower than what they would get in the open market selling directly to consumers, they are comfortable with this system. A few women also sell fish locally at the Taleigao market.

There have been tremendous changes in the fish catch over the years. The post-tsunami period saw a massive drop in mussels and a reduction in oysters which are collected by women. It is not clear whether this was the effect of the 2004 tsunami or a trend of increasing deoxygenation in waters during the period just after the monsoons. Environmental activists also claim that higher levels of ferrous matter and other pollutants in the river, such as sewage, affects the life cycle of the molluscs through the year.

Policy measures

According to the local fisherfolk, one of the biggest reasons for the reduction in catch is the operations of trawlers and mini purseiners which come in from Vasco (a fairly prosperous town on the other side of the Zuari river). These vessels regularly violate the Marine Fishing Regulation Act (MFRA) 1980 which reserves the area up to 2.6 nm (5 km) for traditional crafts. Despite this, they come as close as possible to the banks for fishing. They have the technology to locate large shoals of fish and do not care whether they are collecting eggs or young ones. Owners of these large vessels are usually aware that this is going to damage their own business in the long run, but in the absence of policy measures or their strict implementation to preserve and

replenish fish stocks, they do not want to be left out. They also have the options of moving to greener/bluer pastures and do not have the stakes in sustainable fishing that the local community has.

After a trawler or purseiner comes into the area, it takes about 10-15 days for the small boats to get a 'normal' catch, which is usually an average of 10 kg. During these 10-15 days they get about 2-3 kg, most of which are the less-prized and cheaper varieties of fish.

The women also say that the big vessels keep an eye on the wholesale market. When they notice a good sale, they identify the village from where the women have come and within a day, several trawlers and mini purseiners come to the area and catch as much as they possibly can.

The Department of Fisheries has a full-fledged modern state-of-the-art control room. One key function is to monitor fishing vessels entering Goa's territorial waters. The Department has also acquired a high-speed patrol vessel to curb illegal activities. Members of these fishing communities regularly contact the control room to inform them whenever there are trawlers or mini purseiners in the area. They even contact the Director of Fisheries on their mobile phones. However, neither the marine police nor the patrol boat, which is under the Department of Fisheries, respond in time. Though it should take about 15 minutes for either of these departments to respond, they take over an hour, giving enough time for the vessels to leave the area. Not that it matters if the latter get caught. The fine for violating the rules is a handsome Rs.100 (about US\$1.5), hardly a deterrent for repeat offences. The mini purseiners earn anywhere between Rs 1-2 lakhs (about US\$1,500 – 3,000) per day, while trawlers earn Rs. 20,000 (US\$300) per day.

In response to the communities' demands that strict action against violators be taken, the Department of Fisheries says it cannot increase the fine and there are no notifications to that effect. It is clear that there

is collusion between the large vessel owners and the government departments.

Aqua-sports, particularly aqua-sail boats, have become common in the area over the past two years, mainly with the setting up of a five-star hotel over 28 acres in 2011. The noise and disturbance created by these boats (which come close to the banks) have severely affected the spawning grounds and the amount of fish available. In Nauxi and Bambolim, in particular, there has been a substantial decrease in *shevto* (mullet), mackerel, sardines, crabs and silver-fish. Fishermen had even in previous years protested against aqua-sports in other areas of the state, including in neighbouring communities, but to no avail.

Permission for these boats has been given by three departments—Ports, Tourism and Fisheries. The fishing community spoke to the Fisheries Minister and the Director of the Department of Fisheries regarding their reduced catch due to the sailboats. However, the Department said that it has given permission since these are non-motorized boats and, as such, are unlikely to affect the catch. "Neither of them have any experience with fishing. If they did, they would realize how disturbance in the water affects the fish", says Sanjay Pereira.

The gillnets used by the small-scale fishermen are often damaged by the trawlers or the tourist boats, with no possibility of compensation for the fishermen. The sewage from the hotel is also often released into the river, destroying the fish. This was also brought to the notice of the Department but no action has been taken.

Dwindling Catches

Until about 10 years ago, women used to dry about 25 per cent of the catch. Some of this would be sold, the rest used for domestic consumption, especially in the monsoon period. With the dwindling catches and the reduced space in the community (where some people have sold their lands), women now buy dried fish

from other vendors in the market. This dried fish comes from other parts of the state or the neighbouring state of Karnataka.

Hemmed in and harried as they are by pressures from all sides, the fisherfolk find that the secure rights to their homesteads and continued access to fishing become increasingly irrelevant, with their very livelihoods threatened, their fishing areas exploited by other actors, and their spaces for even minimal expansion limited.

The communities have been trying hard to follow up on promises made and broken, becoming increasingly aware of their rights but not having enough resources against the might of the state and its cronies. Recently, they have sent an appeal to the Governor and the Vice Chancellor of the University asking why three of the temporary posts given to people in their villages and reserved for Scheduled Tribes were given to people from faraway places in Goa once these posts became permanent.

The reason given to the three candidates was that they lacked experience. The communities demanded to know how these candidates were considered acceptable when the posts were temporary. The communities also strongly feel that it is their right to get jobs in the University since it is their lands on which the University has been built and they were promised jobs in the University as a kind of compensation.

Some people from the community of Nauxim have earned large sums of money from the sale of their land to hotels or private owners. However, this was also the result of their tenure rights being of uncertain status unlike in Cakra, resulting in some of them being cheated out of their lands or paid far lower than the market rates. The lack of security of their tenure did determine their bargaining capacity. All these people who have sold their lands no longer live in the villages and have moved to other areas. This is a pattern that may be repeated with other members of the community as well.

The 145-acre luxury coastal gated project, which came up instead of residences for which permissions were given is located near the Siridao-Bambolim bay, flouting CRZ and hill-cutting norms. Environmental organizations took the case to court and after seven years of struggle, the court declared some of the constructions illegal and fined the hotel Rs25 lakh. However, the illegal constructions have not been demolished, since the verdict was not specific enough.

The Gaudas have initiated the formation of an association which includes Other Backward Castes (OBCs). The Shri Shanta Durga Fishermen Association was established seven years ago and covers all of Tiswadi *taluka*. Apart from these five villages, it also includes inland waters in other parts of the *taluka*. Of the 160 members, 30 are women. The main issues taken up by the association are the problems they face due to the mini purseiners and water sports, and how to address these, and the issues regarding the proposed marinas on the Zuari river, which have been the centre of much controversy in recent years, with the government appearing determined to go ahead despite the opposition.

Livelihood protection

Many in these communities have been forced to look elsewhere for sources of income. Some have got government jobs, some are in the private sector or are self-employed. However, they see this as a lack of choice. The fishing community would want their children to continue in fishing if there is a possibility of conserving and responsibly managing the resource. Their struggle is to ensure that small-scale fisheries are protected and that there are stricter bans on letting other players (large vessels, tourism operations, and so on) into the area thereby affecting their livelihood and the environment. The increase in educational levels of the youth are enabling some of them to get jobs in the private sector. However, due to low salaries, they supplement their income with fishing. The communities

fear that if current trends continue with complete disregard for their traditional livelihoods, there will be no option for the coming generation but to look for alternative livelihood sources.

The concerns of the fishing community cannot be seen in isolation from what is going on across the state. The government, irrespective of which party is in power, has been selling land, water and mineral resources to the highest bidder with no thought for the environment or the local people who have lived off, and sustainably managed, these resources. The powerful and well-connected industrial, hotel and real-estate lobbies have the clout to get problems settled in their favour and do not shy away from the use of muscle power as in the famous case of Leading Hotels, which is involved in a very controversial effort to set up a massive golf course in Goa, in the teeth of opposition from locals and environmentalists. In another case, the Supreme Court ordered the demolition of a portion of a five-star resort at Dona Paula. In response, the government passed the Land Acquisition (Goa Amendment) Act, 2009, simply to validate and make legal an extended portion of the construction made by this hotel. The challenge to this amendment was dismissed by the Supreme Court in 2016, with the result that what was declared to be illegal has now become legal, to the immense benefit of the hotel. Ranged against the might of such powerful lobbies, local communities cannot fight the legal and other battles required to get their rights to prevail.

It is in this context that the fisherfolk are viewing many recent developments with trepidation. For example, the fishermen's organization Goencho Ramponkaranchi Ekvott (Unity of Goan Fishermen) or GRE have been protesting the use of high-voltage light-emitting diode (LED) lights and bull trawling off the Goa coast, given that these practices are adversely affecting the livelihood of traditional fishermen. While the former was banned in May 2016 through

a government circular (perhaps to silence the fishermen's protests which have been escalating), it is left to be seen how the ban is implemented.

There are proposals in the pipeline to set up two marinas in Goa ostensibly to boost high-end tourism—one in Nauxim, Bambolim and the other in Chicalim, Sancoale. Due to protests by the fishing communities as well as others and the lack of all clearances, these proposals are currently being held at bay. Apart from public protests, joined in by the Environment Minister, *gram sabha* resolutions have been passed against the marinas. Villagers of Nauxim had opposed the proposal on 5 December 2010 at a *gram sabha* of Curca-Telaulim-Bambolim *panchayat* on 30 January 2011. They alleged that the project is like a declaration of war against indigenous peoples and a threat to food security. Despite all the opposition, the Goa Investment Promotion Board has given in-principle approval to these marinas and once other clearances are obtained, it may be just a matter of time before they are launched. If these projects succeed in getting passed, while they will be advantageous for large fishing vessels, they will completely destroy small-scale fisheries in the state.

It is no wonder that the communities of Oxel, Cakra, Nauxim and Bambolim are worried. They have every reason to be. They foresee a time when, deprived of all livelihood options, they may have to sell out and move away, giving up their traditional livelihoods as well as their homes where they have dwelt all their lives—and with no visible viable alternatives in sight. Modernization and development have come at a high cost for these communities, and it is in this context that one needs to view their struggles and demands. ❧

For more



crzgoa.org/mom/

Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority

goaprintingpress.gov.in/uploads/Land%20Acquisition%20GDD%20Amendment%20Act.pdf

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fisheries.goa.gov.in/

Directorate of Fisheries, Goa