

FROM ASIA/ India**Not amusing**

Fishing communities staying next to one of India's largest amusement parks have much to complain about

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In recent months, about 50,000 people from the traditional fishing communities of Gorai, Culvem and Manori in Mumbai have been trying to focus the attention of the authorities, the media and the general public, on developments in their neighbourhood. Developments that are affecting not only their livelihood, but also the ecological integrity of the sensitive and rich ecosystem that gives them this livelihood. At the forefront of this struggle have been the women of these communities.

Six years ago, India's first and largest amusement park, Essel World, spread over an area of 64 acres, came up near their communities. Owned by a powerful industrial group, this park has been a big success and attracts upto 10,000 visitors per day.

How have the local communities been affected by this park? In several ways, they are quick to point out. Visitors to the park are taken by ferries owned by the park, across the creek. These have, in the past, damaged the nets and boats of fishermen fishing in this creek. The daily requirement of approximately 20,00,000 litres of fresh water, drawn from underground sources, is diminishing ground water levels and leading to salinity ingress. The enormous amount of waste generated by visitors to the park is dumped untreated into the nearby sea, affecting coastal fish resources.

Moreover, while this "state of the art" park has access to all facilities, the fishing communities close to it, though also part of the Greater Mumbai Municipal Corporation, are still deprived of basic amenities: piped potable water, proper roads, sanitation or drainage facilities, uninterrupted supply of electricity, adequate health and education facilities, etc.

Plans to expand the operations of this park are now underway. An additional area of about 700 acres of land was allotted for the purpose by the erstwhile gov-

ernment of the state (province) of Maharashtra in May 1997. What is significant is that the land allotted is actually mangrove area. The vital functions performed by these remaining mangrove areas in an over-populated and polluted city like Mumbai need not be elaborated. This allotment is also in clear violation of the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification of 1991, which seeks to protect coastal resources, as well as fragile natural resources along creeks and natural channels.

Since the allotment, mangroves in the area are being systematically destroyed. An illegal 1500-metre illegal dam constructed under cover of night in April 1998, stopped the natural flow of tidal water and obstructed the free plying of the small boats used by the community. As a result of the dam construction and the use of chemicals, mangroves in about half the 700-acre area have perished. Despite orders by the Collector the dam has still not been broken to re-establish flow of tidal water. In April-May 2000, there was yet another attempt to construct yet another small dam. However, as a result of opposition by local people and an order from the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, this activity was brought to a halt.

Local villagers have undertaken a series of actions to seek justice. They have come together to form a Joint Action Committee. They are demanding action to protect and regenerate the mangroves. They are demanding a recognition of the right of fishing communities to live in dignity off the resource base they have depended on for generations. They are seeking to question the meaning of what is seen as "development". For this, they have undertaken a series of protest actions using non-violent means. They have also taken the case to court.

In order to make money the rich are able to displace people, and destroy the environment. The vast majority of people depending on these life resources are the victims. In the process natural capital is destroyed and fishing communities are displaced.