

**Asia/India****Development for whom?**

*Even though incomes have increased as fishing becomes more technology- and capital-intensive, they often do not translate into a better quality of life for the fishing community, particularly for women*

**by Nalini Nayak, a member of Protsahan, an NGO based in Trivandrum, India, and a Member of ICSF**

I recently saw the film *Darwin's Nightmare*. While, on the one hand, it highlights the impact that the introduction of the Nile perch in Lake Victoria has had on the ecosystem, on the other, it also vividly reveals the interlinkages between neoliberal globalization and patriarchy that result in inhuman lives for people who actually live around this 'highly productive' lake. The film was well done, although a bit long-drawn-out. Yet it has the effect of entering one's bones and arousing anger from within.

I also saw another film in the making, which depicts child labour in the fishery of the Upper Volta region of Ghana. The children lead a hard and precarious life and, in the process, are denied the normal rights of children. This is another face of neoliberal globalization, where children's labour is exploited. And yet society is supposed to be progressing and technology so highly advanced. It is clear that all these advances are not aimed at creating better lives for most people, but at profit and well-being for a few.

In this context, I would like to mention a study that I, together with two other colleagues, have just completed, on the impact of development on coastal population dynamics and the environment. This is a study undertaken in three locations on the west coast of India. Although there is no space here to share all the complexities and findings of the study, some disturbing facts are worth highlighting.

One of the locations of the study was a coastal town (population: 158,000) that houses two major industries, the fishing industry and a chemical industry that produces rayon. Both these industries employ a large number of people, and the town buzzes with

activity. The harbour there saw large fish landings in the 1980s and 1990s, and fish exports from there generated a great deal of foreign exchange for the country.

There is only one community (caste) that controls the fishery there, and their members are the owners of the trawlers, the dominant fishing craft. There are over 2,500 trawlers (32-45 feet long) in just one harbour. These boats have no modern equipment, not even a global positioning system (GPS). The boatowners themselves do not go to sea, and several of them are illiterate. The majority of the workers on the boats are migrants who come to the area for the nine-month trawling season. Throughout this period, they live on the boats, as their fishing trips are long, between nine to 11 days, with one day at the most in the harbour for offloading fish and loading ice and provisions, before they return for the next trip. While they get wages, they remain invisible workers who have absolutely no other rights.

As mentioned earlier, the fishery in this area was booming until about three years ago when overfishing resulted in falling catch per unit effort. But what has been the impact? Some of the boatowners certainly did make money, constructed big houses and were able to educate their children, and some even moved into other businesses. But the life of the workers on board the trawlers is pitiable, and so is the life for women in the community.



The town receives water for a few hours, once in two days. It is the women's burden to fetch and store water. Some women have to walk one kilometre to fetch water, or pay for it. The city has absolutely no drainage system so all wastewater runs on the streets. There is no organized sewage disposal system either. Children use the open drains and the pigs act as scavengers. Most of the sewage flows into the canal and into the harbour.

It is also worth noting that as fishing has become more capital-intensive, the practice of dowry ('gifts' in cash or kind given by the girl's parents at the time of marriage) has become more common. The women become the medium through which capital transfers are made at the time of marriage. Parents of girls who cannot afford a dowry remain unmarried. The community sometimes arranges collective marriage ceremonies to cut down marriage costs. The female sex ratio in this town has also fallen: In 2001, there were only 953 females to 1000 males in the population and, worse still, only 913 females to 1000 males in the 0-6 age group. Female foeticide has been reported from some parts of India. One wonders whether this is happening here too.

As surprising, in this otherwise prosperous town, there are still a large number of people who cannot afford to send their children to school. Around 26 per cent of children between 6 and 16 years do not attend school. Our study reveals that despite development improving gross incomes, it does not translate into a better life for people in the community at large and for women, in particular. The role of the State in providing basic infrastructure and social services is pitifully absent. Ironically, this State happens to be one of the most economically advanced in India. As women, we need to look more closely at the impact of present-day development on women, in particular, and begin to dream of another development paradigm that respects both life and livelihood.

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