

**Asia/ India****A Disaster in the Making**

*The Indian government is seeking to replace existing coastal regulation with reforms for coastal privatization. The impact on fishing communities, particularly women, will be devastating*

**By Nilanjana Biswas, writer and researcher on developmental issues**

Home to more than 6 mn fisher people, India's over 7,500-km long coastline has become something of a battleground in recent times. The only piece of legislation that protects India's coasts is a notification issued in 1991: the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification. Although, in its original form, the notification offered some protection to fragile coastal ecosystems and made mention of the traditional rights of fishing communities, subsequently, numerous amendments and violations made mockery of the law. Today, the government is seeking to altogether dismantle the Notification and introduce in its place another Notification: the Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Notification.

There are numerous problems with this move. There has been no consultation with fishing communities—surely the primary stakeholders in such a process! Further, enacting new legislation without penalizing existing violations under the 1991 CRZ Notification, primarily by commercial interests, will help only to legitimize the violations. The zonal demarcations being proposed will pave the way for the displacement of fisherpeople from their traditional habitats and open up ecologically sensitive coastal areas to unbridled commercial exploitation. The privatization that will be introduced in the name of coastal management is nothing short of a recipe for large-scale disaster.

The gender dimensions of the impending disaster are particularly worrisome. Already, decades of commercialization have degraded Indian coasts, and created havoc in the lives of fisherwomen, restricting their access to their traditional means of livelihood.



Aided by the proposed reforms, as an unregulated free market takes over the coasts, the impact on women will be devastating.

Privatized beaches will mean no place for drying fish, mending nets, or carrying out all the ancillary activities that provide fisherwomen a means of survival. Sand and mineral mining—activities already controlled by organized mafia—will weaken large tracts of the coast, causing flooding and sea water intrusion. Drinking water, food security and housing—the basic rights of fishing communities, indeed every human being—will be undermined, thus overburdening women who bear the primary responsibility for the family. Further, hotels, resorts and entertainment parks mushrooming along the scenic coasts will open up avenues for sex tourism and pedophilia, multiplying, among other problems, the incidence of HIV/AIDS in a country already classified as high-risk for the disease.

A number of campaigns have been initiated against the proposed coastal reforms and the CZM Notification. United, consistent and widespread public pressure is needed to force the Indian government to reverse the perilous path it has chosen to follow in recent times.

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