

Livelihood Intervention for Fishing Community in Coastal Saurashtra by Utthan Trust and People's Learning Centre

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Background

Utthan, an NGO based in Gujarat has been working in Panchmahal and Dahod districts of the tribal belt in Gujarat and Bhavnagar and Amreli districts of coastal Saurashtra, covering about 173 villages through local community teams to improve livelihood through Integrated Natural Resource Management. Utthan began its work in 1981 from Dhandhuka taluka/tehsil, Ahmedabad district, in the *Bhal*, a coastal saline backward region of Gujarat as Utthan-Mahiti. In 1994, Mahiti became an independent local organization while Utthan's interventions continued in the coastal and tribal belt. It has established ***People's Learning Center (Coastal Livelihood and Disaster Mitigation)-PLC(CL&DM)*** in the coastal areas with a view to provide a platform for exchange of information between formal and informal knowledge systems, leading to better solutions for sustainable livelihood augmentation of the people in these areas. The PLC (CL&DM) is funded by American India Foundation for three years (2006-09). The PLC is expected to consolidate various interventions by Utthan in the coastal areas along with the community, under an umbrella organization and to share and exchange knowledge, experiences and ideas with others at state, national and international levels.

The dynamic nature of the coast, the threats it is subject to and the constant changes (human and environmental) faced by the communities who live here with risks associated and the difficult work involved in harnessing these coastal resources has always been a feature of the livelihood of these coastal communities. The livelihoods pattern of diverse communities along the coastline of the country have come under severe stress due to a variety of reasons, increasing the vulnerability of the marginalized communities. The major traditional livelihood systems along the Saurashtra coast excluding industry were agriculture, fisheries and salt-work. These occupations are now diminishing, leading to large scale forced migration, one of the direct reasons being problems due to coastal salinity. Due to heavy withdrawals of ground water from coastal plain area, ground water depletion has caused sea-water to move inland into fresh water aquifers. The coastal belt of Mahuva Taluka in **Bhavnagar district** and Raluja in **Amreli District** is severely affected due to salinity ingress. This has had a negative impact on the livelihoods of the people.

Utthan feels that for the development of this coastal region an integrated programme covering crop production, fisheries, animal husbandry and forestry, providing for improvement in infrastructural facilities including communication, water and sanitation along with active participation of communities especially women and existing institutions based on sharing values of human rights, equity and justice would revitalize local livelihood.

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This case deals with the work done with the fishing community in this coastal belt since June 2004 as part of Utthan's natural resources management program activities. Since 2006, this initiative was expanded to nearly 35 kms of the coast line along the Arabian Sea from Katpar in Bhavnagar to Rampar in Rajula of Amreli District as a part of People's Learning Centre (CL&DM) initiative. This aquaculture intervention is part of the people-centric coastal initiative to strengthen the local sources of employment, self-help groups as well as to demonstrate fisheries as a major potential income generating activity in the region.

Livelihood Intervention with Fishing Community

The initiative is designed to assist communities whose livelihood is severely affected due to salinity ingress in the two clusters of Akthariya in Mahuva block, Bhavnagar, Chanch-Bawadia in Rajula block, Amreli. Initially the intervention started with women's self-help groups which later started out with productive activities related to fishing. Their success prompted the men to join the groups. Today there are 17 self-help groups with 138 women and 176 men who are engaged in on-shore and sea fishing.

A support system was created to understand and resolve the problems and issues of fisher folk and increase their collective strength. With the help of their savings and technical support from the PLC, these groups are engaged in catching fish, crab, sand (rock/spiny) lobster etc. They are also engaged in prawn rearing, fish-drying, fish manure production and marketing of their produce. Efforts have been made to strengthen the fisheries groups, implement cluster-based activities and demonstrate income enhancement through lobster fattening through sea case or pit culture. Innovative inputs on lobster rearing at the seashore till they grow to 250 grams in weight have been provided.

On the marketing front, instead of the earlier practice of going through middle-men, direct sale of their catch in the local markets and in the state level market at Vereval has augmented their returns.

Utthan and People's Learning Centre has helped to establish linkages with Coastal Salinity Prevention Cell (CSPC) and Migrant Workers Development Trust (MWDT,) which came up with financial support in the form of a revolving fund of INRupees 7,30,000 for two years. It has also been possible to take up capacity building by mobilizing Government resources from Fish Farmers Development Agency (FFDA), Department of Fisheries and Government of Gujarat.

Achievements and Impacts

Since the intervention is only two year old it is a bit early to assess the impacts. However the initial results are very encouraging:

- Sales from fish catching increased from Rs 18, 51,375/- in 2005-06 to Rs 21, 41,169/- in 2006-07 representing an increase of nearly 16%.
- The sales from fish for individual members of the group increased from a range of Rs. 70-80/ day to Rs. 150-500/ day. The fishing activity is carried out for 12-18 days a month. Assuming 15 days on an average, the average monthly income increased from Rs. 1125/- to Rs. 4875/- per member from fishing alone.

- During the *off season* these groups supplement their income by selling fish manure. This was not being practiced prior to the intervention.
- Two groups have also been engaged in the high income return livelihood activity of Lobster fattening through pit and cage culture. Lobster fetches a high price of Rs 500-700/- kg.
- There has been a qualitative increase in the capacities of individual members who previously used to depend on income from crab alone but now own their own nets and have increased their fish catch.
- As a result of these activities 11 families have stopped migrating for work.
- The increase in social capital is a distinct achievement. These groups are moving towards the formation of the "*Dariyai Maha Lok Sanghathan*", an area level federation/fisheries cooperative.

Institutional Arrangements

Utthan Trust has started incubating **People Learning Centre** in the coastal area of Saurashtra with a view to make them people-centered and professional developmental agency that serve as a platform for developing innovative solutions for coastal area problems and which help local people's institutions through capacity building and networking. The PLC is run by a multi-disciplinary team of professionals but governed by a governing council elected by the people. In due course PLC will become an independent, formal, umbrella developmental agency for the local region which is run and managed by themselves. This is a proven strategy which Utthan had used successfully during the eighties in the coastal area of Dhandhuka taluka where it had incubated "Mahiti" (Information) center which later became a formal developmental institution run by the people of the region.

Working with the fisher-folk communities, the PLC has in turn promoted **fisheries SHGs** and these are now being federated into a **Fisheries Federation**. It is expected to be registered as a Cooperative. However, we are also considering other alternatives like society and Section-25 Company. While the PLC provides soft-ware inputs, the **Farmers Fisheries Development Agency (FFDA)** which is the state's agency at the district level provides technical inputs. Linkages have also been established with **CSPC and MWDT** which are providing financial support to the initiative. CSPC also provides technical inputs.

The institutional arrangements for the intervention are mapped in the **Figure 1** and the institutional choices at various levels are shown in the **Table 1** attached.

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Figure 1: Mapping of Institutional Arrangements

Functions	Levels						Linkages with other institutions
	Village	Cluster	Block	District	State	National	
Main							
Employment							
Natural resource augmentation				FFDA			
Input supply Technical inputs							
Credit supply							MWDT CSPC
Knowledge center							
Primary production	Fisheries Self Help Group	Fisheries Federation (in process)					Fisheries Dept.
Secondary production							
Marketing							
Others							
Supportive							
Creating awareness & mobilization		PLC (CL&DM)					
Capacity building							
Research							
Policy advocacy							
Developing infrastructure							CSPC

Table 1:

Institution	Level	Functions	Characteristics*	Legal Personality‡
Fisheries Self Help Group	Grassroots	Individual fisherwomen/ men/families engaged in fish catching, Drying and selling	<i>Integrated / Specialised Sectoral / Holistic Exclusive / Inclusive Formal / Informal Flexible / Rigid and Standardized Democratic /Non-democratic Collective / Non-collective Self managed / Externally managed <u>Ownership: Self-owned/ Investor owned/Civil society owned / Govt owned /Private- CSR</u></i>	None
<p><i>Why was this form chosen:</i> Prior to this intervention, few individuals/families were engaged in fish catching and earned a small income. This collective group strength along with technical support has given them increased incomes, savings and social and trading identity as group</p>			<p><i>What other forms were considered:</i> This was a natural choice replicating success among women saving and credit groups</p>	
Area Level Fisheries Federation (in process)	cluster level	To represent and work for the issues affecting the fisheries groups; To negotiate with external agencies and markets in a better way	<i>Integrated / Specialised Sectoral / Holistic Exclusive / Inclusive Formal / Informal Flexible / Rigid and Standardized Democratic /Non-democratic Collective / Non-collective Self managed / Externally managed <u>Ownership: Self-owned/ Investor owned/Civil society owned / Govt owned /Private- CSR</u></i>	None as of now
<p><i>Why was this form chosen:</i> Would most likely be a registered as Fishermen & women’s Cooperative To give an area level representation of the fisheries activity</p>			<p><i>What other forms were considered:</i> Section 25 Company and Society are also being considered as alternatives. (We are looking for advise and suggestions on this.)</p>	
People’s Learning Centre	Cluster level	To provide hand-holding support and capacity building of people’s institutions; To network with external knowledge and financial institutions	See Utthan Trust below	Part of Utthan as of now

<p>Farmers Fisheries Development or Agency (FFDA), Bhavnagar & Jaffrabad</p>	<p>District level</p>	<p>To impart training and support through the various government sponsored schemes.</p>	<p><i>Integrated / Specialised Sectoral / Holistic Exclusive / Inclusive Formal / Informal Flexible / Rigid and Standardized Democratic / Non-democratic Collective / Non-collective Self managed / Externally managed / Professionally managed</i> <u>Ownership:</u> Self-owned/ Investor owned/Civil society owned / Govt owned /Private- CSR</p>	<p>Society</p>
<p><i>Why was this form chosen:</i> It is the agency that support the fishing activities in the district</p>			<p><i>What other forms were considered:</i> No</p>	
<p>Utthan Trust</p>	<p>All levels</p>	<p>To incubate the PLCs until they spawn out into autonomous people's institutions; To network and carry out research and policy advocacy on devp. issues of coastal communities</p>	<p><i>Integrated / Specialised Sectoral / Holistic Exclusive / Inclusive Formal / Informal Flexible / Rigid and Standardized Democratic / Non-democratic Collective / Non-collective Self managed / Externally managed / Professionally managed</i> <u>Ownership:</u> Self-owned/ Investor owned /Civil society owned / Govt owned /Private- CSR</p>	<p>Trust and society</p>
<p><i>Why was this form chosen:</i> This was considered the best option for civil society organizations in the eighties when it was established.</p>			<p><i>What other forms were considered:</i> None</p>	

* Mark the applicable characteristics in **bold**