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Good practices of civil society organizations in supporting small-scale fisheries in South-east India

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Securing sustainable small-scale fisheries: sharing good practices from around the world



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Women's roles are often seen as supportive of men's productive roles, such as cleaning the fish catch, Myanmar (©FAO/Bel Angeles); Beginnings of local tourism, Myanmar (©FAO/Bel Angeles); A pirogue in Andavadoaka, southwest Madagascar, prepares to sail to the octopus fishing grounds (©Blue Ventures/Anouk Neuhaus).

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Harvesting yellow clams in Uruguay (©FAO/Sebastián Horta); Carrying fish for sale, India (©FAO/V. Vivekanandan/Maarten Bavinck); Restored Rupa Lake in front of the Annapurna range, Nepal (©FAO/Rupa Lake Restoration and Fisheries Cooperative).

Securing sustainable small-scale fisheries: sharing good practices from around the world

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Good practices of civil society organizations in supporting small-scale fisheries in Southeast India¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case study of the small-scale fisheries of Nagapattinam and Karaikal districts in Tamil Nadu, India, showing the relevance of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). The SSF Guidelines refer to the need to enhance the capacity of small-scale fishing communities in order to enable them to participate in decision-making and organizational development. CSOs representing small-scale fishers and fishworkers played a key role in the development of the SSF Guidelines and, with regard to implementation, they should remain the main drivers of change. The study covered four major types of institutions: traditional village councils, cooperatives, self-help groups and Non-governmental Organizations. While all four types occupy their own niche in the fisheries environment, the study shows that the village councils (or *ur panchayats*) are the most significant institution for small-scale fisheries (although others can play important roles as well). The study also identifies important actions taken, including strengthening small-scale fishers' opportunities to market their catches for fair prices, ensuring equitable access to tsunami relief and rehabilitation, and defending the coastal area and traditional tenure rights. The authors note that local CSO action needs to be linked to larger national initiatives when issues are complex and cannot be resolved merely by local action. This is of great importance in a large federal nation like India where decision-making takes place at different scale levels.

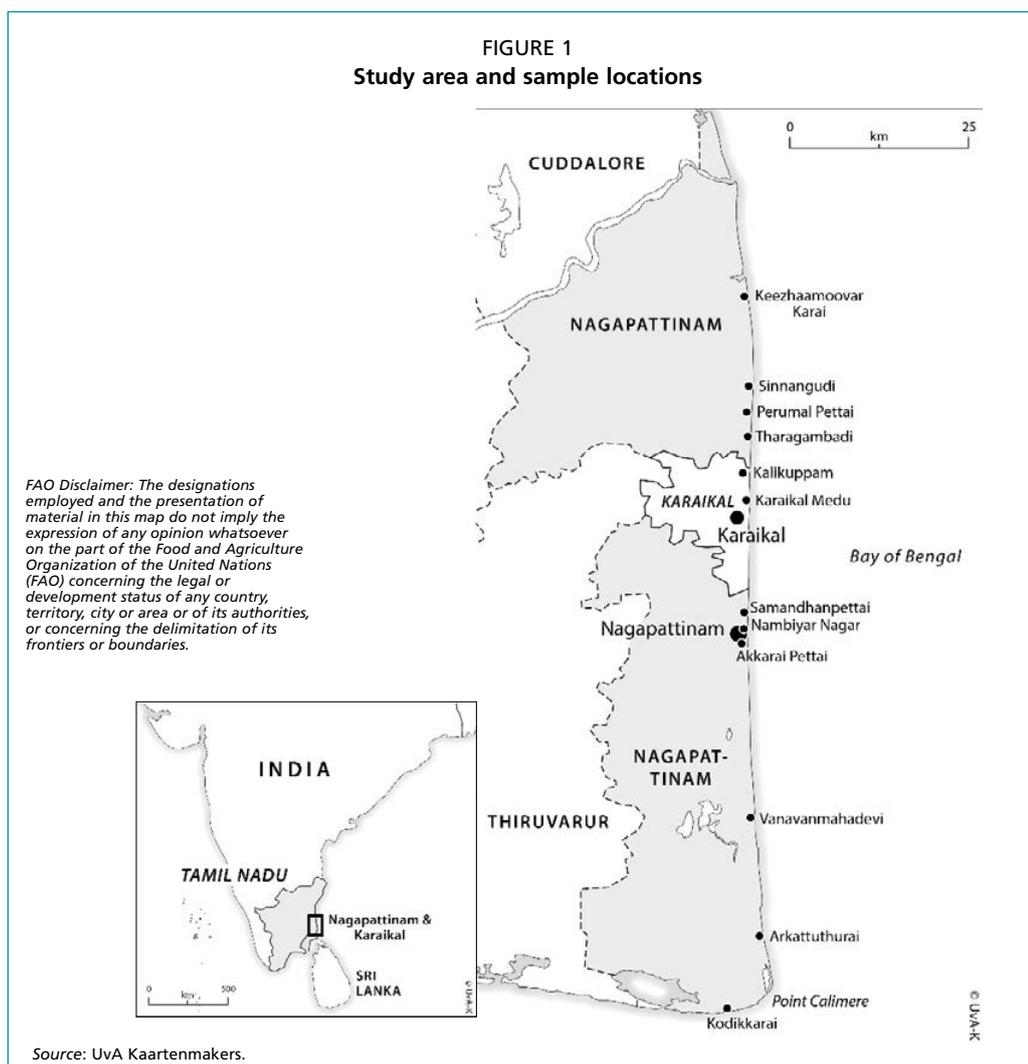
1. INTRODUCTION

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines), although adopted by

¹ This paper summarizes a study carried out for FAO in 2013. Sections of the paper relating to the role of traditional village councils were published earlier: see Bavinck, M. 2016. The role of informal village councils (*ur panchayat*) in Nagapattinam District and Karaikal, India. In S.V. Star and D. Kalikoski, eds. *Strengthening organizations and collective action in fisheries – towards the formulation of a capacity development programme*, pp. 383–404. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Proceedings 41. Rome, FAO; and Bavinck, M. 2017. Enhancing the wellbeing of Tamil fishing communities: the role of self-governing *ur panchayats* along the Coromandel Coast, India. In D. Johnson, T. Acott, N. Stacey and J. Urquhart, eds. *Social wellbeing and the values of small-scale fishing*. Dordrecht, the Netherlands, Springer.

FAO in 2015, need to be further adopted by a large number of actors in addition to governments in order to become a powerful tool for improving the lot of fishing communities in developing countries. The kinds of organizations and institutions – collectively known as civil society organizations (CSOs) – that exist in fishing villages and influence the well-being of the local community are only vaguely known. Traditional institutions of various kinds as well as new forms of organizations, like cooperatives, microfinance self-help groups, trade unions and associations, all contribute towards improvement of fishing communities through a variety of mechanisms. These include service delivery, self-help, advocating for rights, fisheries governance, and linkages with government and markets, among others.

This paper presents a case study focusing on the present and future contribution of CSOs to the implementation of the SSF Guidelines and the realization of sustainable small-scale fisheries in one region of India's long and differentiated shoreline: the coast of Nagapattinam and Karaikal districts in Tamil Nadu (see Figure 1). This coast was badly impacted by the tsunami of 2004, and therefore became the scene of intense rehabilitation activity. The ensuing period of protracted attention allowed the detection of previously unidentified CSO activity, such as that of traditional village councils, or *ur panchayats*. The rehabilitation effort also resulted in a plethora of new CSO activity, sometimes in conjunction with and sometimes independent of government. All in all, this region presented the right microenvironment for an investigation into potential CSO involvement.



The research team was charged with determining the present and potential future contribution of CSOs to sustainable small-scale fisheries. More precisely, the lead questions for research were formulated as:

1. To what extent do CSOs (a) act and (b) interact with each other as well as with state agencies to provide environmental, economic and social support to small-scale fisheries?
2. How can their contribution be improved?

The Fisheries Management Resource Centre (FishMARC) has been working with small-scale fishers since its inception; it employs professionals with a long history of engagement with small-scale fisheries in southern India.² The FishMARC team put together to conduct this case study was divided into four smaller groups that produced subreports on four types of CSO activity in the region. Their results are collated and discussed in this paper.

The paper is divided into four sections. In this introduction, we describe the geographical, historical and institutional context of small-scale fisheries in Nagapattinam and Karaikal districts, as well as the characteristics of the small-scale fisheries and the challenges they face. The second section presents the research methodology. The third section then discusses the range of CSO activity occurring in the region, organized according to organizational types. It also examines interactions between CSOs and their relations with state agencies, and considers the policy environment as well. Conclusions and a set of good practices wind up the paper.

1.1 Geography

The state of Tamil Nadu has a coastline of 1 076 km, with 13 coastal districts (including Nagapattinam) and 591 fishing villages. It ranks fourth in the country in fish production and has a well-established Department of Fisheries. Historical coincidence has ensured that Karaikal belongs not to Tamil Nadu but to the Union Territory of Puducherry. Although there are administrative variations between the two districts, their fisheries policies are very similar. The minor differences that exist are therefore set aside for the purposes of this study.

Nagapattinam and Karaikal districts have a combined coastline of approximately 200 km in length, with 58 fishing villages and a fishing population of 95 663 (CMFRI, 2010). The coast is sandy and flat, but punctuated by many creeks, inlets and estuaries belonging to the delta of the Cauvery River. There is a high density of aquaculture farms. Similar to other parts of the Indian coast, many ports and power plants are currently under development.

There are two major fishing harbours located in the towns of Nagapattinam and Karaikal where the so-called mechanized boat industry is based. These trawl fleets are involved in fishing off the coast of Sri Lanka and therefore embroiled in the transboundary fishing conflicts taking place there (Scholtens, Bavinck and Soosai, 2012).

The fishing population along this coastline belongs in overwhelming majority to the Pattinavar sea fishing caste (Bharati, 1999). Only one of our sample locations – the migratory fishing site called Kodikkarai – is governed by people of non-fishing caste. The social homogeneity of the fishing population has made for extensive marriage networks up and down the coast, and a coherent institutional structure. The Pattinavar in particular are known for the strength of their traditional governing arrangements (Bavinck, 2001).

The tsunami that hit the mainland of India in December 2004 had a disastrous impact on these two districts, which therefore accounted for the majority of casualties.

² FishMARC, registered in 2009, is a professional non-profit organization specializing in fisheries.

Tsunami relief and rehabilitation efforts were intensive and sometimes overwhelming. By the time of this case study, post-tsunami rehabilitation activities had mostly concluded and almost all external agencies had left the region.

1.2 Historical development of the fisheries

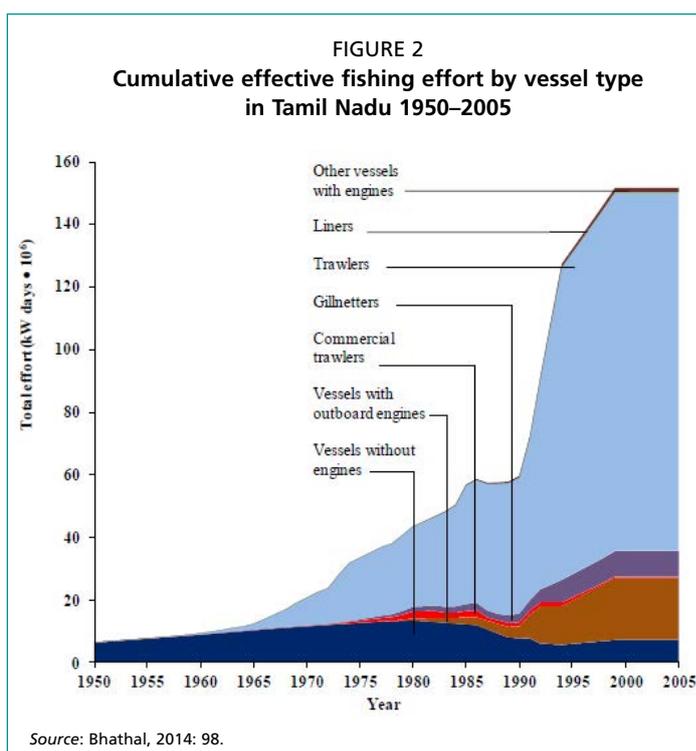
The ocean fisheries of India and specifically Tamil Nadu date back many centuries. This is evidenced, for example, by the fact that fishing has become a caste-based, hereditary occupation (albeit in the lower echelons of the caste system, as fishing involves the killing of living beings). The Tamil Nadu coastline is generally divided into three sections according to its physical features, prevailing fishing technology, and distribution of fishing castes. Nagapattinam and Karaikal districts belong to the Coromandel Coast, and are dominated by fishers of the Pattinavar caste. Fishers live in single-caste settlements along the shore and are recognized for the strength of their self-governing structures. Self-governance is anchored in the tradition of village councils, or *ur panchayats*, that have authority over coastal space and its usage, as well as over the fishing population.

Before the Second World War, the fishing population of Tamil Nadu was known for its poverty and backwardness. Fishing technology was simple and generally small-scale, catches were low, and markets were underdeveloped. This changed with Indian Independence and the pursuit of social and economic modernization. In tandem with the Green Revolution, the Government of India launched a Blue Revolution to increase fish production and improve the living standards of the fishing population (Bavinck, 2001; Ram, 1991; Subramanian, 2009). This was done through the introduction of trawl technology, the construction of landing centres, and the development of preservation and transport methods, along with integration into the world economy. Thus a trawl fishing subsector was created. Concentrated in new harbour locations, the trawl fishing population was often separate from the small-scale fishing population settled in villages along the coastline. As trawl fishers tended to fish the inshore zone, where most marine resources are located, heavy conflicts with small-scale fisheries soon developed. The Tamil Nadu Government, like other state governments in India, tended to side with

the modern fisheries it had introduced, forcing the small-scale fisheries sector to come to terms with the new context.

Although trawl fisheries have expanded along the Coromandel Coast, accounting for more than 50 percent of fish landings, the small-scale fisheries sector is still very much alive particularly in rural settings. While catch per unit effort (CPUE) has often gone down, small-scale fishers have benefited from boat motorization, the introduction of synthetic gear, and the steady increase in fish prices (Bavinck, 2014). Motorization has been widespread in small-scale fisheries, with *kattumarams*, the traditional fishing craft, being almost completely replaced by fibreglass boats in the post-tsunami rehabilitation phase.

Figure 2 presents an overview of the fishing effort as it has developed in Tamil Nadu since 1950. The small-



scale fisheries are represented by vessels with and without outboard engines. It is clear that the majority of growth in fishing effort in this period can be attributed to trawl fisheries.

Increased fishing effort has resulted in declining CPUE, as witnessed in Figure 3. Experts point to evidence that marine resources – with the exception of oil sardines – as a whole are declining. Bhathal (2014: 166) thus argues that Indian fisheries, including those of Tamil Nadu, “have suffered from sequential depletion of coastal stocks and would have shown the signs of this depletion many years ago were it not masked by the expansion

into new areas and the multispecies nature of the fisheries” (cf. Vivekanandan, Srinath and Kuriakose, 2005). Fishers along the Tamil Nadu coast generally agree with this assessment and are pessimistic about the future.

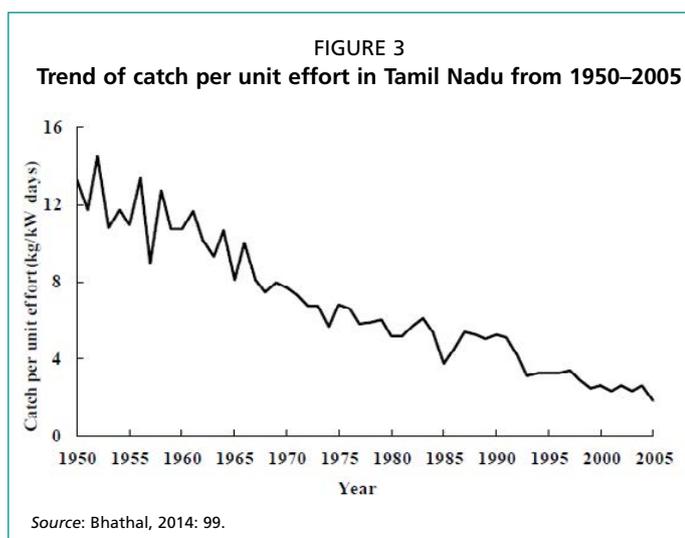
Changes in the fisheries have come about in parallel with other societal transformations. The coast is no longer the preserve of fishers alone; other user groups are appearing on the horizon. Pollution and the damming of rivers is affecting the fisheries; harbour works are causing coastal erosion; and aquaculture, industry, tourism development and urban expansion are bringing about new claims on coastal space. It is in this context that a fisher in one of the sample locations anxiously enquired of the research team whether its goal was to move the population out of the village.

Fishers are responding to changing circumstances by sending their children to school and hoping that education will help them find a profession outside fishing. Many young fishermen are seeking lucrative, if temporary, jobs in Singapore or in the Gulf countries. At the same time, most members of the population seem to be remaining in the fisheries, either through necessity or by choice.

1.3 Institutional context

The institutional context of fisheries along the Coromandel Coast has been analysed in terms of legal pluralism, or the coincidence of legal systems belonging to government as well as to the fishing population (Bavinck, 2001). The oldest and most tenuous of the legal systems in fisheries originates in fishing communities, coinciding with the authority of village councils that are traditionally the mainstay of fisher well-being. With the strengthening of government influence over coastal affairs, however, and the development of state welfare programmes, village councils have seen their power seriously reduced. The siding of government with the trawl fishing subsector has further undermined their control over village affairs – although, as we shall see below, it is still substantial.

The prime legislation governing fisheries in Tamil Nadu is the Marine Fishing Regulation Act (1984), the main aim of which has been to separate the trawl fisheries and small-scale fisheries spatially and temporarily, and to mitigate social conflicts (Bavinck, 2003). This goal, however, has only partially been achieved, and conflicts between the two subsectors continue. The Act also provides a basis for prohibiting the use of detrimental gear, such as pair trawling and ring seining. The rules that are in force, however, are barely implemented. Pair trawling and ring seining are currently the source of fierce disputes within the fishing population itself, with government officials playing a sideline role.



Governmental involvement with fisheries in Tamil Nadu has hitherto largely been motivated by production increase and conflict management. A long-term perspective on environmental sustainability and management is lacking, although the FIMSUL project, funded by the World Bank and FAO, has made inroads into a new perspective (see www.sites.google.com/site/fimsul, accessed 17-10-2018).

The cooperative movement has old roots in Tamil Nadu and was adopted by post-Independence governments as a vehicle for social development and political patronage. The Fisheries Department has promoted the establishment of fisheries cooperatives in every fishing settlement in the state mainly for the purpose of channelling government programmes. Recent decades have also seen the development of an independent cooperative movement in the fisheries of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, promoted by the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS).

In order to alleviate poverty and initiate economic development from below, governments in India have promoted the establishment of self-help groups (SHG), also in the coastal zone. These SHGs, which generally consist of women, are linked to outside credit sources such as banks. Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) too have been establishing SHGs in the coastal zone, sometimes with the additional goals of awareness raising and political mobilization. The post-tsunami rehabilitation effort resulted in a surge in the number of NGOs undertaking activities for and with the fishing population.

1.4 Nature of small-scale fisheries in the case study area

The 58 fishing villages of Nagapattinam and Karaikal districts are distributed more or less equally along the coastline, with clusters developing particularly around coastal towns. The trawl fisheries of the region are concentrated in the harbours of Nagapattinam and Karaikal; however, many trawl owners and workers live in surrounding coastal villages. While the towns still have some small-scale fisheries, the latter predominate in rural areas – that is to say, in the large majority of fishing settlements in the region.

Like all small-scale fisheries in the world (Jentoft and Chuenpagdee, 2015), there are substantial differences within the small-scale fisheries subsector in the Nagapattinam-Karaikal region, particularly in gear type and target species. While almost all fishers nowadays make use of small, beach-landed fibreglass craft (length < 5 m, maximum 30 HP), their activities vary from season to season depending on climatic conditions, the availability of species, and market values. Fishing villages also develop their own specializations. Thus, fishers in Keezhamoovarkarai, for example, make use of twin-engine boats to longline for tuna; Kalikuppam fishers have recently taken to ring seining; and fishers in Vanavanmahadevi go for multiday gillnet fishing in search of big fish, which often takes them into Sri Lankan waters. Other villages make use of a judicious mix of fishing gear.

Village councils in most of our sample villages (N = 7) make decisions on regulating unwanted gear types, such as so-called “snail nets”. Local knowledge teaches, for example, that snail net fishing has negative consequences for other fish stocks, as well as for social equality (Bavinck and Karunaharan, 2006). The main debate now taking place along this coastline, however, is over ring seining by groups of small-scale fishers. Ring seining was introduced in Kerala in the 1980s and has since been appearing along the Tamil Nadu coast as well. Of the seven sample villages, two have banned the use of ring seines, but fishers in other villages still use this type of gear. A meeting of representatives of all 58 fishing villages in May 2013 decided to prohibit ring seining completely along this coastline as of 2016; however, this decision was not implemented and the ring seine fleet has actually increased. Understandably, many fishing leaders have expressed doubts as to whether village councils will actually be able to reverse the trend towards ring seines.

Small-scale fishers have various opinions about the future of fisheries in the region. While some fishers see positive trends, most respondents are deeply worried. Young fishers in Kalikuppam complained that “there is nothing left in the sea”, and linked this to the trend of foreign labour migration as well as to the ongoing shift to ring seining. Bottom trawling is considered to be a main cause of resource depletion, but is now too entrenched to be resisted. Emotional reactions are therefore mainly reserved for pair trawling and ring seining, both of which have been prohibited by the Fisheries Department, but are still practised nonetheless. As one fisher in Vanavanmahadevi explained: “If we can stop pair trawling and ring seining, there is definitely a future for fisheries here.” Other fishers point to industrial pollution as a cause of decline. Solutions are sought through better enforcement of existing governmental regulations, setting a ceiling on the number of fishing licenses, and curbing of pollution.

2. METHODOLOGY

The team conducted a planning workshop in Chennai on 16 October 2013 to prepare for field-work. Tasks were subsequently divided between the four subgroups that focused on village councils (*ur panchayats*), cooperatives, self-help groups and NGOs respectively. Field studies took place in subsequent months. However, three of the four sub-studies proved to contain gaps that could be filled only in the course of 2014.

The subreports contain detailed information on the methodology employed for the sub-studies. Each sub-study commenced with a review of the literature on the topic in question. A stakeholder meeting was convened in Nagapattinam on 20 October 2013 to inform fishing leaders and other key actors about the purpose of the research. The subgroups strove to achieve a balance between in-depth, local study and a review of regional trends. The in-depth analysis focused on 12 fishing villages, representing 20 percent of the total fishing settlements in the region. These villages were mainly selected on the basis of geographical coverage. Research there consisted of a combination of focus group discussions, interviews with leaders and small-scale fishers, attendance of village meetings, and observations. Table 1 provides an overview of the 12 locations and the studies situated there (also see Figure 1). In a number of sample locations, more than one sub-study was conducted. The NGO sub-study concentrated not on a selection of fishing villages but rather on organizations.

TABLE 1
Sample research locations in Nagapattinam and Karaikal districts

	Village name	Sub-studies conducted
1	Keezhamoovar Karai	SHG/cooperative/village council
2	Chinnangudi	Village council
3	Perumal Pettai	Cooperative
4	Kalikuppam	SHG/village council
5	Tarangambadi	SHG/cooperative
6	Karaikalmedu	Cooperative
7	Samandhanpettai	Cooperative/village council
8	Nambiyar Nagar	Village council
9	Akkarai Pettai	SHG
10	Vanavanmahadevi	Cooperative/village council
11	Arkattuthurai	SHG
12	Kodikarai	Village council

Sample study results were complemented with interviews with key stakeholders and observers from the areas of government, academia, markets and civil society. Surveys provided the necessary quantitative data on specific topics. The mixed nature of the

team facilitated the achievement of a balanced gender perspective.

It must be noted that it is not easy to separate small-scale fisheries from other types in the region. Although trawl fishing is concentrated in harbour towns, trawl fishers frequently still live in their home villages among small-scale fishers. Small-scale fishers too often also work in both subsectors. The research team was thus not able to make a sharp separation between small-scale and other fishing types, except through the choice of sample locations.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Village councils and their contribution to small-scale fisheries

The *ur panchayats* that are found along the Nagapattinam-Karaikal coastline belong to a classical form of self-government in India (Mandelbaum, 1970). The *panchayat* system dates back to precolonial times and is closely intertwined with other forms of social organization, such as caste and community. The fishing settlements of this coast have preserved these institutions to an unusual extent (Bavinck, 2001). The fact that these settlements are generally of a single-caste variety means that social and territorial identities coincide.

Each of the fishing villages on this coast is governed by an *ur panchayat* that is elected from among the male population, using age, family lineage, education, and leadership qualities as criteria. These councils have authority over all other organizational bodies in the village (cooperatives, SHGs, etc.). They raise taxes, dispense justice, and represent the village to the outside world, such as with government agencies. They are thus the most crucial local bodies for the small-scale fisheries of this region.

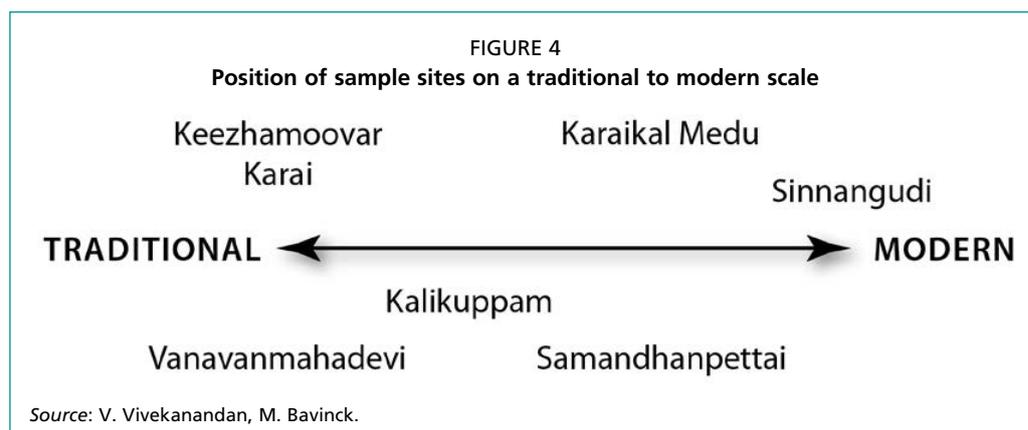
Like community organizations all over the world, *ur panchayats* in this region are sometimes factionalized and may have disputes between them, but rarely lastingly so. They are loosely embedded in higher level bodies at the *taluk* (subdistrict) and regional level. The regional organization encompasses 58 fishing villages (traditionally 64 villages³) in the Nagapattinam-Karaikal region; it has a traditional head village, but its position is currently challenged by the leaders of an urban fishing centre that also enjoys the support of the current Minister for Fisheries of the Government of Tamil Nadu.

Ur panchayats differ from each other in terms of their structure, scope and activities, and can be positioned on a scale ranging from “traditional” to “modern”.⁴ Figure 4 positions the seven sample *ur panchayats* in our case study on this composite scale. On the left side of the scale we find *ur panchayats* that are traditional in the composition of their councils, which consist almost completely of fishermen. These *ur panchayats* take upon themselves a wide range of tasks and play a strong role in community affairs. Their traditional concerns emerge from their intrusion into the marriage decisions of their members. They are also heavily involved in fisher dispute regulation and rule-making.

The *ur panchayat* on the right is the only one to be found on the other side of the spectrum. The dominant leaders here are well-educated and have largely moved out of fishing. Their interests have shifted to handling the relations between the village and

³ The difference in number is explained by the exit of some villages on the northern end of Nagapattinam, as it made more sense for them to be part of the regional organization of the Cuddalore district to which they belong. It may be noted that the number 64 is notional, as it is an auspicious number in local tradition. Thus it is quite likely that the Nagapattinam regional body may not have had 64 villages as members most of the time. The redrawing of district boundaries by the state government has often resulted in the redrawing of the boundaries of the Pattinavar regional organizations. This is in stark contrast to Karaikal, which has remained part of the Nagapattinam regional organization despite not being part of Tamil Nadu. This is best explained by the fact that Karaikal is an enclave within Nagapattinam, and is neither viable as an independent regional organization nor can it join any other regional organization.

⁴ We use the terms “traditional” and “modern” not in a normative but in a descriptive sense, indicating various measures of continuity with the past.



the outside world, and in accessing relevant government programmes. The concerns of fishing concomitantly receive less attention. Still, this *ur panchayat* assumes prime authority over local affairs. It is also one of only a few *ur panchayats* that have implemented a public sanitation programme.

Other *ur panchayats* occupy middle positions on the scale from traditional to modern, thereby confirming their institutional dynamism and the very local centre of gravity. Whereas the more remote settlements tend to have more traditional *ur panchayats*, and vice versa, this pattern does not, however, always run true. Other factors – which lie beyond the scope of this study – seem to play an intermediary role in *ur panchayat* orientation.

Ur panchayat activities can be categorized in various ways. We have chosen to distinguish between social concerns, fisheries management concerns (economic and environmental), and concerns of connecting with (or defending against) government (and other external agencies).

Social concerns

Ur panchayats' prime responsibility – and the ultimate justification for their work – is social in nature and can be formulated as “care for the settlement’s population”. This concern expresses itself in various ways. From a financial viewpoint, the largest outlay any *ur panchayat* in the region makes is for the annual temple festival, which always lasts several days and draws crowds from the entire region. One belief of these temple festivals is that they can ensure safety at sea as well as the possibility of good catches. It is for these reasons that the extravagant religious activities of *ur panchayats* cannot be dissociated from inhabitants’ general well-being, and from the hope and expectation of continued wealth from the sea.

Another principal responsibility of the *ur panchayats* is dispute resolution. In the fishing settlements of the region in the case study, it is generally understood that – with the exception of serious offences like murder – disputes are preferably handled by the *ur panchayat* and not by the police (who it is felt bring about serious losses in terms of money and time). Fines are actually imposed on those who, without prior consent, seek the support of the police to settle disputes. The range of disputes handled by *ur panchayats* is wide and reflects the variety of quarrels and conflicts that permeate closely-knit rural communities, as well as small-scale fisheries. While some disputes are local in nature, others involve people outside the fishing village; in such cases, *ur panchayats* play a representative role.

Fishers in this region generally acknowledge the importance of education, and it is important to note the role of *ur panchayats* in boosting educational performance. For example, in one of the sample villages the *ur panchayat* has committed itself firmly to supporting the government-funded elementary school in the village. Not only does it oblige parents to send their children to this, and not to other schools in the vicinity; it

pays the salary of a supplementary teacher, contributes additional school materials, and helps ensure the success of school events.

Fisheries management concerns

With the majority of their population depending on fishing and fish trading for a livelihood, the *ur panchayats* of the Nagapattinam-Karaikal coastline naturally involve themselves in fisheries matters. Everyone in the region, including government officers, agrees that the disputes that take place over fishing matters – quarrels over nets getting tangled or vessels being damaged, fish that has been bought but not paid for, loans that are not settled – are brought to the *ur panchayats* for resolution, and nowhere else. Here again, if such disputes involve parties outside the village, other *ur panchayats* are consulted and involved.

The rule-setting behaviour of *ur panchayats* is structurally significant. As is seen along other parts of the Coromandel Coast (Bavinck and Karunaharan, 2006), *ur panchayats* in this region often strive to curb the use of fishing methods that are considered environmentally and/or socially harmful. The decline of resources is a matter of anxiety. The most significant current evidence of *ur panchayats*' concern for regulating harmful fishing gear derives from the current internal debate on the prohibition of ring seines. Some villages have actually prohibited this kind of gear, while others are more permissive. The discussion that takes place over these matters at the regional scale is fierce and still undecided.

While prohibition of gear constitutes one form of regulation, the prevention of negative interactions with other gear types is another. Thus the small-scale fishers of one sample village, who depend on longlining, have successfully intervened with nearby trawl centres to limit trawl fishing in the inshore zone. This same village also presents an example of how *ur panchayats* regulate market access at the landing site. Safety at sea is another issue of key concern for small-scale fishers: What if an engine fails, or the men – for whatever reason – do not return to shore as expected? In these circumstances, *ur panchayats* take charge of organizing rescue operations.

Connecting with the outside world

As the importance of government and the outside world has grown, other aspects have come to the fore. This became most evident in the post-tsunami period, when relief and rehabilitation were important concerns. It was during this period that *ur panchayats* replaced older, illiterate leaders with younger men who had been to school and knew how to talk to officials.

Interventions with government can be divided into two types. The first is directed towards maintaining village autonomy and protecting villagers from untoward interference. The abovementioned rule of discouraging the involvement of the police in village matters is one example of this. *Ur panchayats* similarly guard their autonomy *vis-à-vis* other government agencies, such as the Fisheries Department. The other type of intervention is aimed at obtaining access to crucial government services. The Fisheries Department is a key agency for a variety of fisher welfare schemes, as well as for the distribution of fishing material and the realization of projects such as harbour sites. It is important also for matters such as the registration and licensing of boats. *Ur panchayats* thus stay informed of who occupies such positions as Fisheries Inspector and Assistant Director, and approach them directly or indirectly via the fisheries cooperative president if needed. Similar methods are used with regard to other important outside agencies and departments.

3.2 Cooperatives and their contribution to small-scale fisheries

The fisheries cooperatives seen in the villages of the Nagapattinam-Karaikal region are of two kinds. The first type is linked to the Fisheries Department and available in every

village without exception. The second has been initiated by SIFFS and forms part of its own network. It is available in a selection of fishing villages along the coast in the region. While government cooperatives provide access to a variety of governmental programmes, the SIFFS cooperatives are unique in that they mainly provide marketing services. Being closer to the actual business of fishing, the SIFFS cooperatives also take a stand on important fishing issues.

3.2.1 Government cooperatives

The cooperative movement in India dates back to the first decades of the previous century. The Government of Tamil Nadu established cooperatives for men and women in all fishing villages of the state, channelling important services through this avenue. As a result, both men and women fishers consider membership in these cooperatives a necessary condition not only for professional performance but also for general subsistence. It is interesting in this regard to note that the total membership of fishing cooperatives in Tamil Nadu is significantly higher than the size of the fishing population – an indication of their attraction also among non-fishers. Figures on government cooperatives in the Nagapattinam-Karaikal region are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Government cooperatives and membership in Nagapattinam and Karaikal districts

Cooperatives and membership	Nagapattinam	Karaikal
Number of fishermen cooperatives	52	10
Male membership in cooperatives	28 140	6 702
Number of fisherwomen cooperatives	45	6
Female membership in cooperatives	25 353	3 576

The services offered by government cooperatives are regulatory and supportive. The regulatory services include the provision of fisher identity cards and the registration of fishing craft. Cooperatives also provide the following services:

- Preparation, verification and forwarding of lists of eligible fishers for the savings and relief scheme to the Assistant Director of Fisheries;
- Verification and recommendation of lists of eligible fishermen for financial relief schemes, such as ban period relief and lean period relief, to the Assistant Director of Fisheries;
- Processing lists of fishermen eligible for diesel subsidies;
- Forwarding applications for engine subsidies to the Fisheries Department;
- Interfacing with the Fisheries Department to obtain insurance coverage for fishermen;
- Forwarding applications for educational scholarships to the Tamil Nadu Fishermen Welfare Board.

In addition, some of the cooperatives also run businesses, such as for the provision of fuel or fishing accessories.

3.2.2 SIFFS cooperatives

SIFFS established the Nagai (Nagapattinam) District Fishermen Sangams' Federation (NDFSf) in 2007; the first village-level fish marketing societies were formed around 2004. By 2014, NDFSf had 31 primary societies in the Nagapattinam district with 2004 members, and 3 societies in the Karaikal district with 252 members. While the government cooperatives include practically all adult males, membership in an NDFSf society is typically limited to those owning a fishing unit. Thus, in the villages covered by NDFSf only 10–20 percent of government cooperative members are typically members of the SIFFS cooperative. However, the NDFSf society does cover a relatively high percentage of actual fishing units in any given village.

Every primary society is run by an executive committee that takes decisions on four critical functions: fish sales, credit, savings and insurance. The conventional model of fish sales in a primary society is through open auction on the beach. Societies have regular groups of merchants who participate in auctions, and who benefit by being able to buy fish at a single point. The auction is done by the salespersons appointed by the societies. Credit is typically mobilized by NDFS from sources such as NABARD and other nationalized banks and then extended to the societies. In addition, societies are free to run their own credit programme using their own funds or by obtaining loans from banks. Every member fisher has to join the savings scheme run by the society, which is administered by deducting a certain percentage of the day's catch. The society offers loans as well.

The NDFS societies work only with small-scale fishers, and have been consistent in their position against trawling and other fishing practices such as ring seining. Those fishers that indulge in ring seining have had to leave the societies; in some cases, the societies have been closed down when the practice became too widespread.

3.3 Self-help groups and their contribution to small-scale fisheries

The term “self-help group” in India denotes a group of 10–20 persons (generally women) belonging to a homogeneous economic class who have voluntarily associated for microfinance activities. The origin of the SHG movement in India dates back to the 1980s. A pilot project for linking the SHGs with banks was initiated in 1992, with NABARD taking the lead. Although SHGs are first of all seen as a vehicle of efficient credit delivery, they often have social and political objectives as well. For the purpose of this case study, the team identified three SHG types in the Nagapattinam-Karaikal region (see the SHG subreport for a discussion):

- SHGs that are directly associated with government programmes or schemes: These SHGs are mainly vehicles of microfinance, but their benefits include subsidies under various government schemes as well.
- SHGs as institutions promoted and sustained by NGOs: What makes these different from the first category is their political character, which prompts them to take up roles beyond the confines of microfinance or development delivery.
- Women *Sangams*⁵ organized by SIFFS: These are associated with the SIFFS cooperatives and are engaged in economic activities, but have kept an identity of their own.

Our study found that every fishing village contains an average of 20 SHGs, and that there is generally a mix of the three types mentioned above. Women SHG members are shown to act in an anchoring role so far as family finances are concerned. Survey results show that 50 percent of the members had enrolled in SHGs within the last five years. All respondents had been married, and 25 percent were widows; almost 50 percent consisted of fish vendors.

The most common loan size appeared to be INR 5 000–10 000 (USD 75–150), taken out by 41 percent of the respondents. More than half of the respondents also had loans from other sources such as private moneylenders. Loans from SHGs were used mainly for consumption and to address occasional shocks in the household economy.

3.3.1 Governmental SHGs

The government at different levels has been involved in three different SHG initiatives in the coastal zone: (a) the Mahalir-thittam⁶ programme of the Government of Tamil

⁵ *Sangam*, along with its variants *Sangh* or *Sangha*, is a pan-Indian term denoting a group, association or collective (including cooperatives, trade unions and even political parties).

⁶ Mahalir-thittam, literally meaning “women’s scheme”, is a scheme of the Government of Tamil Nadu for the welfare of women and uses the SHGs as its vehicle for women’s development.

Nadu; (b) the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), which is the flagship rural livelihood promotion programme of the Government of India; and (c) the Post-Tsunami Sustainable Livelihood Project sponsored by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Although none of these programmes make a distinction between fisher beneficiaries and others, figures for coastal versus non-coastal regions are available.

Mahalir-thittam

Mahalir-thittam is a socio-economic programme targeting women and the disabled which brought the Nagapattinam district into its fold in 2010–2011. A total of 15 008 SHGs were formed in the district, with 233 420 women as members. According to the Project Implementation Unit of Mahalir-thittam, the coastal blocks of the district together have 8 076 SHGs, of which 6 263 are rural and 1 813 are urban. While half the rural SHGs in the district are in coastal blocks, 69 percent of the rural SHG members are also found in coastal blocks. The programme is implemented in partnership with NGOs that handle social mobilization and the formation of SHGs. The NGOs also train SHG members and monitor their functioning in a facilitating role. Mahalir-thittam has a system of NGO affiliation based on pre-set criteria. In addition, independent SHGs (where the promoting NGO has already withdrawn in most cases; or in cases where SHGs were formed without a facilitating NGO) are affiliated through their *Panchayat*-level federations (PLFs). In the Nagapattinam district, there are 20 NGOs and 10 PLFs affiliated with Mahalir-thittam.

NRLM

NRLM has been implemented in 252 village *panchayats* in seven blocks of the Nagapattinam district, each of which has multiple clusters. In all there are 15 clusters of NRLM in this region serviced by three facilitators each. The facilitators have the following functions: (a) social mobilization and institution-building, (b) livelihood and skills development, and (c) financial inclusion and reporting. Funds are channelled through Village Poverty Reduction Committees. These are headed by the president of the governmental village *panchayat*, which is different from an *ur panchayat* and is part of a three-tiered system of local self-government institutions mandated by the country's constitution.

IFAD Post-Tsunami Sustainable Livelihood Project

Prompted by the need to promote small livelihoods in the tsunami-affected regions of the district, IFAD's Post-Tsunami Sustainable Livelihood Project covers only coastal villages, and has a total of 1 545 SHGs. IFAD has developed its own design for SHG institution-building to be applied during the course of the project. SHGs are expected to join the new institutional structure irrespective of their origins and past activities.⁷ According to the IFAD team in Nagapattinam, all the SHGs that became part of the IFAD institutional system did not have direct links with any other institutional structure, even if up until then they had been promoted by an NGO (in practice, however, other linkages exist). At the time of this study, the IFAD system had 1 545 SHGs in 192 hamlets, spread across 29 coastal village *panchayats* in seven blocks of the district. The total membership was 22 934.

3.3.2 NGO-sponsored SHGs

Many of the SHGs established by NGOs have become integrated with government programmes and have lost their distinctive identity. Still, some of the older SHGs

⁷ *Panchayat*-level federations were formed subsequently, and all the IFAD-sponsored SHGs have joined these. The *panchayat* in this context refers to the local body that is part of the official government system. Many of the SHGs not sponsored by IFAD have also joined the PLFs, often by cutting off their ties to the NGOs who organized them in the first instance.

maintain connections with their parent NGOs and partake in selective activities. Only one NGO in the Nagapattinam-Karaikal region, called Social Need Education and Human Awareness (SNEHA), has a distinctive SHG programme with a politically activist angle. An outstanding feature of its activities has been the sustained focus on women from fishing communities.

SNEHA today has 598 SHGs in 51 villages along the Nagapattinam-Karaikal stretch of fishing villages. There are 10 676 members. These SHGs are gathered in Village Coordination Sangams, which are present in all villages; however, only around 30 are active. SHGs meet twice a month: the first meeting for discussing the village-level issues and decisions of the *Sangams*, and the second meeting for financial transactions. The women save INR 100 per month each.

SNEHA works in close coordination with the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF), an independent, all-India association of traditional fishworkers. It has been involved in several struggles waged by NFF over the last two decades. SNEHA has also been one of the key members of the Coastal Action Network, a state-level forum formed in 1996 for the protection of coastal ecology and livelihoods. This network has also participated in several struggles in the Nagapattinam-Karaikal region, including protests against the proliferation of coal thermal power plants and coastal shrimp farms. Furthermore, it played an important role in providing relief and rehabilitation services in the post-tsunami period, and has taken initiatives to promote the role of women in *ur panchayat* decision-making.

3.3.3 SIFFS-sponsored SHGs

SIFFS, the apex federation of around 150 village-level fish marketing societies and their district-level federations, is a well-known organization of small-scale fishworkers in south India. It was started in 1994 as an organization of fisherwomen in the Nagapattinam district. Women fish vendors are organized into *Sangams* with a minimum of 20 members. Each group has its own meetings, savings and credit, and operates much like an SHG; groups are also gathered into a village-level committee. The savings of the *Sangram* are managed by NDFS, the district-level federation of fish marketing societies under the SIFFS umbrella.

3.4 NGOs and their contribution to small-scale fisheries

Following the tsunami of December 2004, almost 500 NGOs registered with the NGO Coordination Centre in Nagapattinam to coordinate the relief and rehabilitation activities in the region. The glut of funds encouraged many NGOs to expand their work and workforce. With the completion of many projects and the reduction in available funds, the number of NGOs had tapered off by 2010. A handful of NGOs that are currently active in the fishing villages of the region focus their work in one of six fields: (a) disaster risk reduction, (b) advocacy, (c) livelihood support, (d) development, (e) education, and (f) social welfare. These NGOs are of different “denominations” and originate at different scale levels. While some are part of national- or international-level organizations, others have a local origin. Those that established SHGs as part of their social welfare activities have generally seen these integrated into the programmes of IFAD and the Government of Tamil Nadu (see Section 3.3).

Among the ten NGOs covered under the current study, four stand out in terms of their ability to engage with fishing communities regarding implementation of the SSF Guidelines:

- NDFS focuses on livelihoods with a clear strategy of promoting fisher organizations among small-scale fishers. It advocates its own approach to fisheries management (also see Section 3.2.2).
- Building and Enabling Disaster Resilience of Coastal Communities (BEDROC) has its origin in post-tsunami coordination and centres its work on disaster

risk reduction (DRR). BEDROC enjoys a good relationship with the district administration in Nagapattinam and has established linkages with banks and other financial institutions. It also has good working relationships with other NGOs in the region.

- SNEHA has a long history of working with women in coastal communities as well as implementing educational programmes and awareness-raising initiatives. It employs an activist, rights-based approach (also see Section 3.3.2).
- Established in 1988 as a not-for-profit trust, MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) is an organization with a declared focus on using science and technology for development. So far, however, its technology application programmes for fishing communities have been far from convincing. But its linkages with universities, research institutions and government have been impressive.

3.5 Rights-based CSOs and their contribution to small-scale fisheries

The role of CSOs in Tamil Nadu in ensuring that the rights of the fishing population are established and protected cannot be underestimated. Over the years, they have had considerable influence on policy, both at the national and state level. Some of their landmark achievements that have also impacted small-scale fisheries in our study area are worth listing:

1. Marine Fisheries Regulation Act (1981) and protection of small-scale fisheries rights to the inshore zone;
2. Diesel and kerosene subsidies;
3. Widespread access to welfare schemes;
4. Repeal of scheme for joint ventures in deep-sea fishing;
5. Retention of the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification;
6. Regulation of coastal aquaculture.

It is worth noting, however, that in many instances CSO activity has tended to focus more on rights without being aware of the dangers such rights pose for sustainability of fishing.

The role of *ur panchayats* in managing the internal affairs of the fishing village in the Nagapattinam-Karaikal region is clear and paramount. The *ur panchayat* is also seen as the most significant – if not the sole – representative of the village community *vis-à-vis* the outside world, though it may seek support from outside forces (political parties, NGOs, etc.) to achieve its objectives. For issues relevant to more than one village, the *ur panchayat* system relies on the network of 58 villages (or part of it). However, in terms of representing fishing community interests that transcend village boundaries, the issue of representation becomes more complex.

In the last five decades, the challenges emerging from the outside world that fishing villages must face have become diverse, and are multiplying rapidly. The levels at which these challenges must be addressed are also changing. If most issues could be dealt with at local and district levels a few decades back, now they increasingly require action at the state government level. More importantly, some crucial issues – matters of life and death for the community – require action at a national level. In the era of globalization and climate change, even the international arena requires attention.

This has given rise to a new set of organizations and networks – both formal and informal – that help the community transcend the local and attempt to influence the higher levels. These organizations/networks vary in scale, methodology and style. They increasingly speak what can be considered the language of rights. These “rights-based” organizations take up issues related to the fishing community. Some focus more on general issues while others focus more on fisheries issues. There are also organizations that represent specific subsector interests that take up issues that affect a section of the

fishery or fishermen. This is a phenomenon common to the entire Tamil Nadu coast, but there are some variations that can be observed in Nagapattinam and Karaikal.

Table 4 provides a list of the kind of organizations and networks that have emerged across the coast and their role or relevance in the Nagapattinam-Karaikal region.

3.6 Interaction with civil society organizations and state agencies

The CSOs included in this study have many kinds of interactions, both with each other as well as with state agencies. Bavinck and Gupta (2014), writing about governance in

TABLE 4

Rights-based organizations in Tamil Nadu and their role in small-scale fisheries

Organization/network	Description/role	Modus operandi	Status on Tamil Nadu coast	Status in Nagapattinam-Karaikal region
Local association taking up community issues	Led by an educated person from community who is not an active fisherman but is keenly engaged with fishermen and community issues.	Watchdog role on issues affecting community; lobbying; newsletters; mobilizing community for mass action; networking with others.	Widespread, though with higher density in urban areas.	Weak in Nagapattinam, as traditional <i>panchayats</i> are strong and do not encourage other forms of representative bodies; low level of urbanization.
Political party-affiliated trade union	Advocacy organizations of political parties that take up fishermen issues.	Large demonstrations; lobbying and advocacy.	Weak in Tamil Nadu, but with some presence in pockets like Rameswaram.	Generally absent in Nagapattinam, as community does not encourage organizations with potential to divide the community on political lines.
National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF)	National-level trade union of fishers in existence since 1978; strong fisheries focus.	Takes up state- and national-level issues; mass struggles at national level; advocacy.	Has a presence in most districts through independent affiliated units.	Bay of Bengal Fishworkers Union in Nagapattinam is active and affiliated with NFF.
State-level network(s) of leaders	Loose network of fishing population leaders across the state that is active on important issues.	Solidarity for local struggles occurring in other areas; state-level mobilization on common issues.	Network specific to Tamil Nadu, with weak links in southern districts; dominated by mechanized boat owners.	Nagapattinam often represented in the network by leaders from dominant villages like Akkaraipettai.
Mechanized boat associations and other subsector organizations	Represent interests of particular fishing groups.	Lobbying, advocacy and mass mobilization on issues affecting members.	Boat associations are strong throughout Tamil Nadu; other groups organized only sporadically.	<i>Ur panchayats</i> do not allow subsector associations to try and put up a common front for all fishing groups; individual or groups of fishing villages form temporary alliances to take up gear issues.
Neythal	Alliance of NGOs and fishermen leaders across Tamil Nadu coast that takes up coastal issues.	Awareness raising, advocacy and mass action.	Presence in many coastal districts through member NGOs and leaders.	Strong local membership in Nagapattinam-Karaikal; led successful campaign against shrimp aquaculture in 1990s and campaign against repealing of coastal regulations in 2000s.
National Coastal Protection Campaign	Network of NGOs and fishworker organizations fighting for protection of coastal environments and access rights for fishers to the coast.	Awareness raising, advocacy and mass action.	Good presence in Tamil Nadu through member organizations.	Good presence in Nagapattinam-Karaikal through member organizations.

legal pluralism settings, have drafted a typology consisting of four types: indifference, conflict, accommodation and mutual support. All four relational types are present in the small-scale fisheries of Nagapattinam and Karaikal districts.

Village councils play a key role in the small-scale fisheries of this geographical region, and determine the opportunities and action parameters of other CSOs. Village councils wield far-reaching authority over space, activities and people at the local level, but their ties at supralocal and regional levels are far less developed. Although the shells of previous supralocal and regional decision-making bodies have survived into the present age and continue to play a role in determining larger fisheries management issues, their power is limited. Still, they constitute legitimate platforms for discussions among fishers. The connections that exist between individual councils allow for addressing and resolving smaller intervillage disputes.

The government cooperatives that have been set up in fishing villages seem to adjust themselves to the existing power structure. Local cooperative leaders belong to the village elite and generally bow to the will of the village council. As cooperative leadership is vested with control over important external resources, however, there is a potential tension with the village council that plays out differently in various settings. As individual cooperatives are nested in larger cooperative structures, local leaders have opportunities to meet each other, as well as with government officers.

SIFFS cooperatives are similarly embedded at the local level and constitute a strong regional network with regular consultations. As they have fewer resources and lower membership than government cooperatives, their leadership probably occupies a lower rank locally. However, there is still positive interaction that takes place between the SIFFS cooperatives and the village councils, as clearly seen in the example of Keezhmoovarkarai, where the council temporarily took charge over cooperative activities.

SHGs form part of different networks, depending on their institutional embedding. Those that are linked to state programmes are generally accepted in the village as “government-recognized groups”; their relatively easy access to bank finance contributes to their credibility. SHGs that are connected to NGOs and involve themselves in political activities may be received differently, depending on the issue at hand. For example, the women’s empowerment activities promoted by SNEHA and its network have not been equally appreciated by male-dominated village councils in the region.

The NGOs that have continued to work in Nagapattinam and Karaikal districts after the post-tsunami rehabilitation phase generally concentrate on specific activities and locations where they have achieved a measure of local standing. Relations with village councils are cordial, although the presence of some NGOs is more contested than others. Depending on their respective qualities and networks, these NGOs have connections with each other, as well as with a broader range of civil society, market, and state actors.

The Fisheries Department is the state agency most engaged with the fishing population of the region, and its network of assistant directors and fisheries inspectors is the most involved. The authority of these officials is, however, limited by the political powers that be, as well as by the resistance and demands of village councils with whom they are in contact. It must be noted here that officials generally abstain from visiting the beaches; rather, they wait for fishers and their leaders to present themselves in their offices. Attitudes towards the village councils are mixed: Fisheries Department officials recognize the power of village councils, while not always agreeing with their views. This ambivalence is reciprocated by fishers and their leaders: while realizing the importance of the department for their livelihoods, its officials are often assumed to be ignorant of the fisheries and sometimes corruptible.

3.7 CSOs and the SSF Guidelines

An overview of the activities and achievements of the CSOs in the Nagapattinam-Karaikal region indicates that, without being aware of the SSF Guidelines, they have already implemented many of the recommendations. Many of the recommendations have not just been derived normatively but are based on successful practices as well as learning from failed attempts. Table 5 summarizes the contribution of CSOs in Nagapattinam and Karaikal districts towards implementation of the SSF Guidelines. It also indicates the weaknesses of the different CSOs *vis-à-vis* the SSF Guidelines. For convenience the CSO role is assessed with respect to the major headings in the SSF Guidelines: (i) governance of tenure; (ii) sustainable fisheries; (iii) social development, employment and decent work; (iv) value chains, post-harvest and trade; (v) gender equality; and (vi) disaster risk and climate change.

TABLE 5
CSO contributions towards SSF Guidelines implementation

CSO	Governance of tenure: coastal'	Sustainable resource management/ sea tenure	Social development, employment and decent work	Value chains, post-harvest and trade	Gender equality	Disaster risk and climate change
Village council (ur panchayat)	Custodian of customary use of coastal space; manages use of coastal space satisfactorily among its members; struggles to protect it from encroachment and usurpation by powerful external forces that often enjoy state support.	Sets rules for fishing for its members including use of gear, timings of fishing, landings, etc. While no TURFs exist formally, councils control sea areas close to their shore; settles disputes among fishers, creditors and merchants; controls government cooperative that is involved in fisher and boat registration; struggles to ensure sustainability of fishing, as this requires consensus on common fishing rules along coast.	Lobbies with district administration and government agencies for educational, health, transport and other needs of the village population. Actively cooperates with government agencies in implementing such schemes in the village; spends some of its own resources for such needs as well. Tries to ensure that its workforce has decent working conditions, though notions of decent work may not be in line with ILO conceptions.	Has control over value chain actors operating in village and regulates their activities (timings, terms of engagement, etc.). Lobbies with government for establishment of auction halls, net-mending facilities, etc. Supports establishment of SIFFS cooperatives to obtain better fish prices. However, village councils dominated by local merchants tend to favour them over fishers' interests.	A weakness of the council. Traditional beliefs that women should not be formally part of the council still dominate thinking. However, importance of women's livelihoods is recognized and supported; SHGs are also encouraged. Still, male mediation on women's needs is perceived to have limitations.	Crucial player in almost all aspects of tsunami and cyclone relief and rehabilitation. Role after tsunami in ensuring all-around rehabilitation / development of village was outstanding. Is crucial partner with district administration and NGOs in disaster preparedness.
Government cooperative**	No role	Plays important role in Fisheries Department's tasks of registering fishers and fishing boats, and is a conduit for government subsidies and schemes related to fish production. Democratic functioning is absent; also tends to aggravate fisheries management problems.	Contributes only to the extent that the Fisheries Department may have schemes in this regard. A few cooperatives do run ration shops and provide local services.	Once again, contribution depends on Fisheries Department schemes which are not strong in this thematic area.	Fisheries Department has set up separate fisherwomen cooperatives that are even weaker than the men's cooperatives.	No significant role
SIFFS cooperative	Has contributed significantly to improved economic sustainability of small-scale fisheries through marketing, credit and insurance; takes up fisheries management issues affecting members; decides on issues that can be resolved within membership, but does not have authority (by tradition or law) to act further; acts as a strong pressure group in favour of small-scale fisheries; rejection of ring seine use sends strong signal in favour of sustainability.	As part of SIFFS network, promotes new technologies and methodologies that improve sea safety and on-board comfort.	Significant player in post-harvest and marketing stages; has brought considerable improvements in fish marketing for small-scale fisheries in Nagapattinam-Karaikal (better prices, improved infrastructure, preservation, etc.); also supports women fish vendors through credit sales; has improved fish vendors' access to institutional credit in many villages through formation of joint liability groups and fish vendor societies.	SIFFS cooperatives are basically fishermen's organizations providing useful livelihood support to fisherwomen. While this will strengthen women's role in the fishing economy, it does not automatically help women achieve equality.	Contributes in many ways to disaster risk reduction by making small-scale fisheries more robust and resilient; insurance of fishing equipment still remains unimplemented due to reluctance of insurance companies to accept an unorthodox package and donors' hesitancy to provide initial financial support.	

TABLE 5 (CONTINUED)

CSO	Governance of tenure: coastal ¹	Sustainable resource management/ sea tenure	Social development, employment and decent work	Value chains, post-harvest and trade	Gender equality	Disaster risk and climate change
Women SHGs	SHGs organized by SNEHA have been at the forefront of many struggles to protect the coast from outside forces.	Limited or no role, but can play useful role if there is greater awareness raising among women.	Many SHGs tend to take up a social development agenda in addition to providing financial services; focus is more on motivation/ awareness raising on health, education, etc.	Provide financial services to women involved in livelihoods; limited support with technology and marketing; despite many initiatives, post-harvest practices and value addition have not improved.	SHGs strongly strengthen women's role in the fishing community by giving them new capabilities and self-confidence. They provide a platform for articulating women's (and families') needs and influencing external bodies as well as the village council. However, state control and standardization may rob women of social and gender agendas.	An important possible channel to provide women with knowledge and skills to deal with disasters; not clear if this is how SHGs are being utilized.
NGOs	SNEHA and some other NGOs have played a major role in fighting land grabbing, destruction of mangroves, industrial pollution, etc. They have also been successful in building awareness among fishers on coastal issues.	SIFFS has worked in the past with village councils to develop a community-based fisheries model in Nagapattinam-Karaiikal. It has also provided technology and organizational support to improve small-scale fisheries. MSSRF has Village Knowledge Centres in Nagapattinam and does attempt to raise awareness on sustainable fisheries; otherwise NGOs seem to be weak in understanding fisheries management issues.	NGOs are strong in this thematic area. They tend to provide social services as well as create institutions to handle social development work. However, the limited access to donor support has weakened NGO capabilities in these districts.	Limited role; some attempts to help women develop products and marketing. SNEHA and MSSRF have made serious efforts in this direction, but have a long way to go.	NGOs have played a major role in supporting a gender agenda on the coast. Organizing SHGs and strengthening women's economic roles have gone a long way to increasing women's voice in village and public issues. However, SNEHA has often clashed with village councils on women's issues, and has met with limited success.	Another thematic area where NGOs play a huge role, including information collection and dissemination, awareness raising, mobilization, and service delivery towards disaster risk reduction. BEDROC has experience and expertise in many disaster risk reduction aspects, while SIFFS and SNEHA have rich knowledge on coastal disaster response.
Rights-/ issue- based organizations	Neythal, National Coastal Protection Campaign, NFF and other NGOs and networks play an important role in raising awareness about the coast and mobilizing fishermen and public opinion against coastal destruction.	NFF has fought at national and state levels for policies in favour of small-scale fisheries and sustainability; however, contradictions exist in its demands. While championing the priority of the fishing community in accessing marine resources, most networks are weak in their understanding of fisheries management issues and rarely address inequity in access between small-scale fisheries and mechanized boats. Some articulated demands go against the spirit of sustainable fisheries.	These organizations are strong in taking up social development issues, and they advocate for improvement of state efforts in development of fishing communities. Many have taken up issues of marginal groups in fisheries and post-harvest activities. NFF is also working with government the ILO convention on decent work in fishing.	Some organizations have strongly advocated for improvements in markets and post-harvest infrastructure. However, demand formulation is weak due to lack of successful models and good results in the field.	Some organizations have done good work in highlighting needs of women in fisheries, notably NFF and the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers. They have also drawn attention to women leaders and to national and international issues, and have undertaken various capacity-building initiatives.	Limited contribution except in general awareness raising on climate change and articulation of demands for better disaster preparedness at state level.

* Coastal and marine tenure are separated for this analysis as they form distinctive issues in Nagapattinam, with the former requiring disputes with outside forces while the latter is mainly concerned with use of the sea by the fishers themselves. We have lumped sea tenure together with resource management.

** Though the government cooperative and the SIFFS cooperative have been placed in the same category, both are radically different in their functions and important enough to warrant separate treatment.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This case study demonstrated the relevance of CSOs to the small-scale fisheries of the Nagapattinam-Karaikal region in the context of implementing the SSF Guidelines. The study covered four major types of institutions: traditional village councils, cooperatives, SHGs and NGOs.

While all four types of institutions occupy their own niche within the fisheries environment of the Nagapattinam-Kariakal region, the study shows that the village councils (or *ur panchayats*) are the most significant institution for small-scale fisheries. While being grounded in traditional culture and practices, these village institutions do exhibit significant differences, falling on a continuum of largely traditional to modern. They have three sets of activities: social, fisheries management, and interfacing with the outside world – including *inter alia* the government. In this regard the councils, while protecting their autonomy, work to ensure access to government services for their member families.

Village councils could be considered the most critical, as they also have a say in and even control over some of the other institutions. The government cooperatives are a case in point. Set up by the Government of Tamil Nadu as channels for delivering government programmes at the village level, these cooperatives work in tandem with the village councils. In most villages the councils control their operations; there are even instances when village councils literally manage the functions of the government cooperatives.

A second kind of cooperative institution seen in the Nagapattinam-Karaikal region are the village-level fish marketing societies affiliated with NDFSf. Although not recognized as such, these institutions function as cooperatives and play critical roles in the lives and livelihoods of their members. However, their membership is not as universal as that of the government cooperatives.

Formed under different programmes and by various agencies, SHGs appear to be converging into a government-sponsored structure. The original promoters in most cases are not playing a critical role in their functioning anymore (with the exception of SNEHA and NDFSf, which still try to maintain their identity within the SHGs that they have promoted). The emerging framework of SHGs shows potential for them to take up capacity-building initiatives as well.

After the flurry of the post-tsunami rehabilitation phase, there appears to have been a significant drop in NGO activity in the Nagapattinam-Karaikal region. Now there are only a limited number of NGOs with critical size and presence in the region. NGOs addressing specific themes such as disaster risk reduction (BEDROC), rights awareness (SNEHA), proper technology (MSSRF), and livelihoods (NDFSf) seem to be players with a long-term interest in the region and its people.

Below we present four CSO initiatives that we consider good practices worthy of emulation.

GOOD PRACTICE 1

SIFFS cooperatives: strengthening small-scale fisheries through value chain interventions

The SIFFS cooperatives in Nagapattinam represent a model that gives fishers control over the “first point of sale” and improves their fishing returns. This is most relevant in conditions where preharvest advances from intermediaries and traders tend to depress prices due to lack of bargaining strength on the part of the small-scale fishermen. It involves a two-pronged market intervention: free and fair auction of locally consumed species, and bulk sale of species going to distant markets.

The auction system is preferred for locally consumed species as it caters to a large number of small-scale buyers, mostly fisherwomen. The system in Nagapattinam,

though similar to a traditional auction system, achieves almost “perfect competition” by removing various imperfections: unfair rebates to buyers, price manipulations by auctioneers, and difficulties faced by fishermen in receiving payment from buyers. The cooperative auction is run by salespersons appointed by the cooperative who ensure that the auctions are free and who take full responsibility for collecting payment from buyers. The fishermen’s responsibility is reduced to observing the auction and collecting the money from the cooperative office later in the day, at their own convenience.

The bulk sale methodology is more suitable for distant-market species, as the buyers in this case are large merchants with greater market power with whom the small fishermen lack bargaining power. Cooperatives with a significant quantity of species going to distant markets, including export, pool the member catches of these species, sort them according to species and size/grade, and then temporarily stock them in tanks. The pooled catch is then put up for competitive bidding – species- and grade-wise – by interested merchants. The bulk availability of these species reduces transaction costs, and often bigger buyers and agents of export companies enter the fray to push up prices.

The success of this model is proven by the fact that it has been adopted by small-scale fishers in over 150 fishing villages in South India, with some of the SIFFS cooperatives functioning for over two decades. Evolved and refined over a period of time by the work of pioneering CSOs in South India, this model’s sustainability can be attributed to the following factors: (i) provision of “debt redemption” loans to release fishermen from intermediary control and regular access to credit for replacement of fishing equipment, and (ii) a system of supervision and support through district federations and technical inputs from SIFFS.

GOOD PRACTICE 2

Ur panchayats: ensuring equitable access to tsunami relief and rehabilitation

The tsunami in December 2004 saw the *ur panchayat* play a crucial role in coordinating the relief and rehabilitation work in each and every fishing village of Nagapattinam and Karaikal districts. As the agency with knowledge about every family in the village, the *ur panchayat* dealt with all agencies external to the village (including Government agencies), brought relief to every family in the village, and planned for various village rehabilitation developments. The following examples of actions by the Tarangambadi *ur panchayat* showcase the role of the *ur panchayats* after the tsunami.

Ensuring relief for all

Tarangambadi is a large village with one thousand families. When aid agencies brought 900 food packets, the *ur panchayat* was unwilling to distribute the food packets until the concerned agency brought another 100 packets. The village was unified enough to negotiate with aid agencies to ensure that the needs of all were satisfied. This ensured that during the relief phase when community members were helpless and displaced from their homes, adequate relief reached every family.

Boats for all

With NGOs showing willingness to supply boats (with motors) when the fisheries rehabilitation began, the *ur panchayat*, based on discussions in the village assembly, set a target of 250 boats (with a crew size of four). This would provide employment to all the fishermen in the village. The *ur panchayat* approached many NGOs and negotiated with them to achieve this target. To ensure the quality of the boats supplied, the *ur panchayat* insisted that all NGOs who supplied boats source them from manufacturers approved by the village. Though the boats were given to specific individuals or groups,

they were all parked in the village square over a period of six months until the entire lot of 250 boats reached the village. A village meeting then endorsed the following formula for distribution of the boats:

- All families were notionally given an equal share in the value of the boats.
- Fishermen wanting to own a boat could buy them from the village at 50 percent of the market price.
- As no one had funds to purchase boats, the boats were given to fishermen who agreed to pay the amount within a one-year period.
- Each prospective buyer was to form a group with three other families. The buyer agreed to pay those families their share of the boat price within one year. If this was done and reported to the village, the buyer's full right of ownership would be recognized. If the buyer failed to do so, the boat would be taken back by the village and given to someone else.

This carefully crafted formula was successful, with all the 250 fishermen (representing 250 families) who opted to buy the boats paying the remaining 750 families the value of their share of the boats. Thus a potential situation of inequity between owner and non-owner households was avoided, and was handled instead in a manner that satisfied all families.

An important circumstance in this particular context was that group ownership of boats had not been historically successful in Nagapattinam, as not all families were willing to take on the responsibilities and risks associated with owning a boat. This can be gauged by the fact that the 50 percent subsidy on the value of the boat was not enough to create competition to own the boats. Interestingly, as the *ur panchayat* did not handle any of the money involved, this huge financial transaction was not part of their annual accounts.

Land redistribution to ensure equity and a less congested village

Most of the houses in Tarangambadi were damaged in the tsunami, some partially and others totally. The state policy for post-tsunami housing required that all those who lived within 200 m of the sea were to be relocated beyond the 500 m zone, while those who lived in the 200–500 m zone were given an option to move beyond 500 m, if they wished.

The old settlement was quite congested, with varying plot sizes. Many of the fishermen had less than 3 cents worth of land, which was the plot size allotted to fishermen in the new settlement. Moreover, the civic facilities in the settlement were also poor with narrow winding roads and insufficient space for proper sanitation. When this was pointed out to the *ur panchayat* by the NGO mandated by the State Government to build new houses (as per Government guidelines), a village meeting was convened to discuss the issue. The village accepted a vision of both the old settlement and the new one having similar facilities to ensure good quality of life and equal access to civic facilities. This resulted in an agreement to relocate some of the families in the 200–500 m zone to the new settlement beyond it, giving up their existing plot of land in the old settlement to the village community. This measure ensured that land could be redistributed in



A tsunami colony coming up in Tarangambadi

the old settlement (all those remaining got 3 cents worth of land) and good common infrastructure including roads could be developed.

Eventually, 1 081 new houses were built in Taragambadi, 690 of them in a new settlement beyond 500 m, and the remaining in the old settlement. This resulted in Taragambadi becoming a model village visited by many of those interested in post-tsunami rehabilitation.

An important reason for this success was the participatory process adopted by the NGO in the planning and construction process, which got the inhabitants excited about the future and willing to make sacrifices and changes necessary to achieve it. This experience highlighted the potential for the *ur panchayat* to transform the village when provided with suitable resources.

GOOD PRACTICE 3

CSOs and the fight to protect customary rights to the coast

The fishing communities on the coast have been facing growing threats to their livelihoods and settlements due to a variety of new private and public investments: thermal power plants, ports, jetties, industries, shrimp aquaculture, etc. This trend has been increasing since the early 1990s. While some activities affect livelihoods, others affect quality of life through negative impacts like groundwater depletion/salinization and coastal erosion. Still others also physically displace fishermen settlements, or parts of them, to accommodate the new activity.

An aggravating factor is the absence of proper documented tenure rights to coastal lands and resources. Despite living for centuries on the coast on the basis of customary rights, the absence of proper legal documentation makes it difficult for the fishing communities to protect their settlements, especially the open spaces they use for beaching boats, mending nets, drying fish, and for religious and cultural purposes. The only legal instrument available at the moment is the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification, first brought out in 1991. Though mainly intended to protect the coastal environment, it has been used by fishing communities across the coast to protect their interests. Below are a few instances where the Nagapattinam CSOs have creatively used this instrument.

Taming shrimp aquaculture

Brackish water shrimp aquaculture was begun on a commercial basis in the early 1990s and started spreading across the east coast of India, particularly in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. With a good price for tiger shrimp, the initial investors received windfall profits and a large number of outsiders moved in to cash in on the new “pink gold” rush. Without a regulatory framework in place, and with strong encouragement from state agencies like the Marine Products Development Authority, there was unbridled growth with strong negative consequences, such as groundwater contamination, soil salinization, mangrove destruction, blocking access to fishermen settlements, harvest of shrimp fry from river mouths for natural stocking, and takeover of large tracts of coastal lands and beaches.

The Nagapattinam district was one of the areas where shrimp farms grew to a significant scale, thanks to the low price of land and the decline in agriculture (due to an upper riparian state denying adequate water flow to the lower riparian areas). In response, the fishing community organized protests. However, these were of no use, as government agencies saw the “success” of shrimp aquaculture, and thus the potential to realize a long-cherished ambition to catch up with Southeast Asia, which already had its shrimp aquaculture boom in the 1980s.

The Nagapattinam CSOs, with SNEHA prominent among them, joined hands with CSOs across the east coast of India to form national networks to challenge shrimp

aquaculture at the policy level and in the courts. Public hearings were organized and independent experts were brought in to study the situation and highlight the damage done by shrimp aquaculture, as well as the plight of the fishing communities.

Though much of the fight against shrimp aquaculture was led by CSOs working in the fisheries sector, fishermen were not the only victims. The damage done to farmlands affected farmers and farm labourers. While the affected farmers could survive by joining the shrimp aquaculture bandwagon or sell their lands to those who wished to invest, farm labourers did not have any alternatives. They lost their employment and were left in dire straits. It was from the farm labour sector in Nagapattinam that a strong movement arose against shrimp aquaculture that would make a major impact, both locally and nationally.

The farm labour of the predominantly agrarian district of Nagapattinam had been organized by a Gandhian and veteran freedom fighter, S. Jagannathan and his wife Krishnammal Jagannathan. The couple led a group called LAFTI (Land for Freedom of Tillers), which started fighting for land rights for agriculture labour and mobilizing public opinion against shrimp aquaculture. Jagannathan's image as a freedom fighter and his tireless efforts brought more support to the fight against shrimp aquaculture. He filed a case in the Supreme Court of India in 1993, *S. Jagannath vs Union of India*, that resulted in the first official enquiry into the effects of the practice. The case made legal history in many ways. It made use of the CRZ notification of 1991, which regulated activities within the 0–500 m zone landward of the high tide line. Though shrimp aquaculture was not listed in the notification, the Supreme Court agreed that most forms of shrimp aquaculture were in violation of it. In its landmark judgement of 1997, the Court ruled all shrimp farms within 500 m of the high tide line as illegal and asked the Government to close them down.

The Supreme Court judgement led to closure of a large number of shrimp farms and the eventual creation of a Coastal Aquaculture Authority through a law of the Parliament in 2005. Even though there are many lacunae in this legislation and the implementation of it is far from satisfactory, the CSOs were successful in ensuring that a framework exists to manage shrimp aquaculture in India. Nagapattinam CSOs played a crucial role in this process.

The fight for coastal regulations (2007–2010)

The CRZ notification of 1991, first used to great effect by CSOs in the shrimp aquaculture case, became a major tool for protection of the coastal ecosystem as well as the livelihoods of the fishing communities. Throughout the 1990s, the CRZ 1991 was used to fight new industries and projects that came to the coast without proper environmental assessment. The “public hearing” provision was fully utilized by NGOs and local fishing communities to raise objections to such projects, and the authorities were required to verify these objections carefully. Even if they were lax in this, the courts would then examine them carefully.

This was resented by ambitious investors and government departments promoting investments on the coast. Some State Governments also found their pet projects scuttled on account of the CRZ. Instead of aiming to tighten the compliance of such projects, government departments and the corporate sector started lobbying against the CRZ itself. The Ministry of Environment and Forest, the custodian of the CRZ notification, appointed a committee to explore the reforms needed in the CRZ regime. In 2005, the committee proposed the replacement of the CRZ with a new notification: the Coastal Management Zone (CMZ) notification. Under this new proposal, instead of “rigid” regulations, a more flexible regime based on decentralized “management” plans would be put in place. This was obviously an attempt to avoid a minimum set of regulations common to the coast as a whole, and which could be easily scrutinized by the CSOs and the courts.

This recommendation to scrap the CRZ and replace it with a CMZ was not taken up immediately. It would take another couple of years before the idea would get traction and move forward rapidly within the Government of India. The fishing communities in at least three coastal states had been affected by the tsunami and were all too busy trying to achieve normalcy, and hence they largely ignored this development. However, when the actual steps toward a CMZ started in earnest in 2007, the fishing communities and the CSOs woke up and started discussing its pros and cons.

Recognizing the dangers posed by the CMZ, and the need to take up the issue nationally to have any impact, the local and national CSOs joined together to influence the Ministry of Environment and Forests. NFF, the independent trade union of fishing communities, took a lead in challenging the CMZ concept. It created a broad-based platform called the “National Campaign against the CMZ” that included fishers’ organizations, environmental groups and other CSOs working across the coast. This campaign, which would eventually become the National Coastal Protection Campaign, was instrumental in raising public awareness on the issue and among the fishing communities themselves.

When the draft notification to replace the CRZ with CMZ was officially brought out in March 2008, the NFF launched a Coastal *Yatra* (“march”) that saw its leaders travel across the coast, from Kutch on the west coast to Kolkata on the east coast, over a period of one month. The march helped mobilize the entire fishing community along the 6 000 km coastline of peninsular India against the proposed CMZ. Protests and demonstrations took place all over the coast, including a “fisheries ban” where fishing activities completely ceased and no fish was sold in the major coastal cities.

Eventually, the Ministry caved in and agreed to scrap the proposal for a CMZ and retain the CRZ regime. However, a new CRZ notification was proposed with a view to “strengthen” the CRZ. A series of consultations were held in the coastal states by the Ministry in preparation for this. The first draft that came out of this proved unsatisfactory to the fishers, and they took to protests and demonstrations again. Finally, a clause by clause negotiation with an NFF team in December 2010 paved the way for a new CRZ 2011, which is the prevailing regulation at the moment. Though the notification did not weed out all the defects that had crept into the CRZ 1991 through administrative amendments, it contains a number of provisions that protect the fishing settlements on the coast and ensures that the needs of the fishing communities are considered while protecting the environment.

Nagapattinam, as one of the districts with the longest history of action on coastal issues, continued to be active throughout this period, with many CSOs playing their role in local mobilization against the CMZ. SNEHA and the Coastal Action Network were prominently involved in the fight against the CMZ.

Mapping the fishing villages and establishing tenure rights

The absence of proper documentation of the use of coastal space by the fishing communities has been seen as a major gap in the establishment of fishing community tenure rights on the coast. The CRZ 2011, though only an environmental regulation, has attempted to partially resolve this through a creative provision. It requires that all fishing villages on the coast be mapped, including common spaces used for livelihood and cultural purposes. This in turn will ensure that the Coastal Zone Management Plans (CZMPs), an important tool for implementation in the CRZ regime, will record this use of coastal space by the fishing communities. While providing land rights was well beyond the scope of the CRZ notification, it would ensure that there is an official record that would help fishermen establish their customary rights.

However, despite this provision, the government agencies responsible for this did not take any action in mapping fishing villages, due to a combination of apathy and a lack of clarity on how this could be done. To break this impasse as well as to ensure

that fishing community rights are best established by the communities themselves, a few CSOs have started the process of mapping fishing villages using hand-held GPS devices (used nowadays by small-scale fishermen on motorized canoes). The Tamil Nadu and Puducherry CSOs are at the forefront of this attempt. The Pondy CAN (Pondicherry Citizens Action Network), Coastal Resource Centre in Chennai and SNEHA in Nagapattinam are all active in working with fishing communities in their respective areas of influence to help them map their own villages.

The “Map Your Village” movement has gathered some steam and around 25–30 fishing villages in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry have been mapped as part of this process. Most of these have been drawn in a participatory manner and have received approval by the village population that has verified the maps. This has already had an impact on the current process of development of new CZMPs as per the CRZ 2011. Some of the community-drawn maps have been used by the authorities in the official CZMPs. In some areas, these self-drawn maps have been used to point out mistakes in the draft CZMPs released for public comment by the Tamil Nadu state authorities. Some of these have also gained legitimacy, as they were drawn up using training provided by a Central Government scientific institute, the Integrated Coastal & Marine Area Management, and have been verified by them as well.

The community-drawn maps are now showing the way forward in establishing the customary rights of coastal fishermen. Nagapattinam and its CSOs continue to play a crucial role in this.

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Dry fish at landing centre
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