Community-based fisheries management in Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu

In the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami disaster, a conducive environment has been created among the Pattinavar fishing community of Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu, to address the problems that have been hampering the fisheries sector, specifically, dwindling catches and declining catch quality.

A 2000-year-old traditional governance system of 64 villages, federated at the level of eight, 16, 32 and 64 villages, is still in evidence among the fishing communities in this area. The advent of the modern State has reduced this to 54 villages. As part of this, the traditional panchayat exercises substantial control over the communities, especially in conflict resolution and in management of village affairs, including fisheries. Building on the prevalence and recognition of these traditional structures in this area, efforts at community-based resource management at the local level and co-management at higher levels have been initiated. The formation of a 21-member Resource Management Council, with representative from fishing communities, has facilitated discussions on issues of livelihood, fisheries management, development and welfare. The Assistant Director of Fisheries of the district is a member of the Council.

District level meetings and training programmes on fisheries management, with inputs from the Fisheries Department, have been organized at the initiative of the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS), along with FAO's United Nations Team for Tsunami Recovery Support (UNTRS). The approach in Nagapattinam has been to build a livelihood-oriented and people-centred process for the planning, design and implementation of policies for fisheries management. With the further support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), there are plans to develop a management plan and to sustain regular meetings of the council.