

which, if built, will definitely influence the future survival of nesting sea turtles in Southern Africa. On the other side of the coin Mozambique is about to declare a huge marine reserve which

will include the Primeira and Segundo Islands north of the Zambezi River estuary which will include green and hawksbill turtle nesting beaches.

Literature cited

Hughes, G.R. 1982. The beacon fades at Bhanga Nek. *African Wildlife* 36 (4-5): 131-134.

Local communities and the Dharma debate: An interview with Mangaraj Panda, Coordinator of the OMRCC

Aarathi Sridhar

*Dakshin Foundation, 2nd Floor, "Gowri Nilaya", Behind Baptist Hospital, Vinayak Nagar, Hebbal, Bangalore 560024, India
Email: aarthisridhar@yahoo.co.uk*

The most audible opponents of the Dhamra Port project have been conservation organisations such as Greenpeace, turtle biologists and environmentalists from across the country and beyond. The positions of some of these organisations have been recorded in previous issues of the IOTN (Issue 1 and 8). Most of these groups are galvanised into action around the impacts this port poses to the olive ridley turtles that come to this region. The main point of contention is that this port, located on the Orissa coast is minor only in classification¹ and in reality will have several negative impacts on the ecosystems of the region.

This port project along with several coastal infrastructure projects has been opposed by fisherfolk organisations who believe that these projects negatively affect the traditional fisher communities of the region. The National Fishworkers Forum and the Orissa Traditional Fish Worker's Union have documented their protest against the Dhamra Port project.

The Orissa Marine Resources Conservation Consortium (OMRCC) is an independent body

comprising of traditional fishworkers, scientists, civil society organisations and individuals concerned with the conservation of marine resources and livelihood security in Orissa's coastal areas. The Orissa Traditional Fish Workers' Union (OTFWU) is a member of the OMRCC. I interviewed Mangaraj Panda, the Convenor of the OMRCC who spoke about the opposition to the Dhamra port project and the nature of the agitation against it.

Aarathi Sridhar: From your point of view, what will be the impacts of the Dhamra Port on the marine life, ecosystems and livelihoods?

Mangaraj Panda: The Dhamra port is very close to the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary, so definitely it will have a negative ecological impact especially on the endangered (saltwater) crocodile, horseshoe crab and olive ridley turtle. Definitely, the people who depend on coastal and marine resources will be deprived and only outsiders who are technically sound - technical experts will get benefits from this. The others whose literacy level is low, and who don't have any expertise in any other sort of income generation other than fishing, will be deprived and they will become the servants of those officials and officers and the women will become housemaids to earn a livelihood. All sorts of notorious elements will arrive such as stevedore

¹ According to the Indian Ports Act, any port governed by the State Government is classified as a minor port and other ports are classified as Major Ports.

companies and this increase will mean that the number of conflicts will increase leading to more internal conflicts. The local people will be victimised.

Aarthi Sridhar: What is the position of the fisher organisations, both trawler as well as the traditional fisher communities?

Mangaraj Panda: Now actually there is an illusion among the trawler owners that they will get a better place to berth their vessels. The Paradip Port Authority (a government undertaking) planned a harbour for the trawlers when the Paradip Port was being built, to enable them to berth their boats upon payment of fees, to undertake regular dredging and so on. Private ports will not do such charity and they will not give such free services to the trawlers. So they are also going to be victimised. But now there is an illusion that they will get better services and get provisions if the port comes. If a government owned port does not allow the traditional fishers to enter their port, how will a private port allow them? This is the general logic, and both the trawlers and the traditional fisherfolk will be victimised.

Aarthi Sridhar: What has been the nature of the agitation against this port?

Mangaraj Panda: Because there is this illusion going on, the agitation at this point of time is on a very low scale, but those who understand the internal dynamics are quite keen on supporting those who are against this port project. A number of groups have expressed solidarity with Greenpeace in its opposition to this project. So definitely people will support anyone who comes and encourages people; who express their opposition to this project, keeping the interest of local and traditional inhabitants in mind. Then, people will definitely react against this port project.

Aarthi Sridhar: What do you think of the IUCN's involvement with this Dhamra Port?

Mangaraj Panda: It is controversial. The Indian bench of the IUCN is already divided and as for Co-Chair of the Marine Turtle Specialist Group, IUCN - his statement and his involvement - without taking the support of local MTSG

members; his statement is really pathetic and unwarranted.

Aarthi Sridhar: What is the role of the OMRCC and what is it going to do in future about this project?

Mangaraj Panda: As per our mandate we support traditional fishworkers in their livelihood and we know that this port will affect their livelihood like in the Paradip port area where they *have* been victimised, and in the Gopalpur port area where they are *going* to be victimised. We have also seen why the fisher people agitated against the Gangavaram port in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh and how they were affected by this project. All these instances are with us in the OMRCC and we are educating the OTFWU who is a founder member of the OMRCC. Definitely the OMRCC will stand by the OTFWU and the traditional fishworker people. We will support their decision and their actions and we will continue to encourage them to react against this port project.

Aarthi Sridhar: As a person from a civil society organisation (the United Artists' Association), as a person who has worked with fisherfolk communities and as a Convener of the ORMCC, what are your concerns about the perspective of the Orissa government on coastal livelihoods and development?

Mangaraj Panda: The Government of Orissa has become a government for corporates, mining agencies and multinationals. Today if I go to the Government of Orissa with a good proposal saying that I will invest 'x' millions of rupees, the Government of Orissa will invite me, house me in their guest house, and treat me like a big boss and they will provide me what ever I demand. This is what is happening literally throughout the state now. There are different political parties in Orissa. Whether the Congress, BJD, or BJP - whoever comes to the chair - for their personal interest, for their party funds, for their election campaigning expenses, definitely they will go the way of the corporates and industrial houses. Nobody will think of poor people. This is the behaviour of all parties. When politicians are in the opposition party, then they express solidarity with the people. For example, when the National Fishworkers' Forum went to Atal Behari

Vajpayee and L.K. Advani of the Bharatiya Janata Party when they were in opposition at the Centre, at that time the BJP expressed solidarity with the NFF, but as soon as they were in power, they had forgotten their stand, their support to NFF and their support for fishworkers and they acted to the tune of the corporates.

Aarthi Sridhar: How does the same case reflect in the local politics at Dhamra? At the POSCO site there was so much opposition, despite the local politics.

Mangaraj Panda: The way the local politics works is that people get involved in politics for

personal gain. This is especially true of the non-traditional and non-coastal inhabitants - some literate, some semi-literate and even some educated people, who engage in this. This also includes people who think that political intervention will ensure them a berth in the company, and if they can spend some money, they can get a contractor-ship and make more money. There are also several people who stand to gain monetarily from creating a nuisance. Keeping this in mind, they are supporting the port project. However, ultimately they will suffer the consequences of this project once this port is established and their dream will be over.

End of Interview

Note: Harekrishna Debnath, the Chairperson of the National Fishworkers Forum noted in his letter to the Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Forests “*The impacts of all this activity in this important fishing ground are going to be devastating. Despite this, the port has been accorded environmental clearance by your Ministry in 1997. It is our view that this environmental clearance given to the Dhamra Port is completely illegal. This port has been accorded environmental clearance several years ago based on an Environment Impact Assessment Report*

done by Kirloskar Consultants. This report is a shoddy EIA report and was meant for an earlier port design by the earlier project proponent. This EIA does not even attempt to assess the impacts on fishing communities and contains very poor information on the social and environmental impacts of this port on the fishing communities in this region. We do not accept this outdated EIA for the present project. There have also been no public hearings for this project despite this having significant impacts on fisheries.”