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Coastal regulation zone rules in coastal panchayats (villages) of Kerala, India vis-à-vis socio-economic impacts from the recently introduced peoples' participatory program for local self-governance and sustainable development

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Abstract

Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification was issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forest of Government of India in February 1991 as a part of the Environmental Protection Act of 1986 to protect the coast from eroding and to preserve its natural resources. The initial notification did not distinguish the variability and diversity of various coastal states before enforcing it on the various states and Union Territories. Impact assessments were not carried out to assess its impact on socio-economic life of the coastal population. For the very same reason, it was unnoticed or rather ignored till 1994 when the Supreme Court of India made a land mark judgment on the fate of the coastal aquaculture which by then had established as an economically successful industry in many South Indian States. Coastal aquaculture in its modern form was a prohibited activity within CRZ. Lately, only various stakeholders of the coast realized the real impact of the CRZ rules on their property rights and

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business. To overcome the initial drawbacks several amendments were made in the regulation to suit regional needs.

In 1995, another great transformation took place in the State of Kerala as a part of the re-organization of the local self government institutions into a decentralized three tier system called “Panchayathi Raj System”. In 1997, the state government also decided to transfer the power with the required budget outlay to the grass root level panchayats (villages) and municipalities to plan and implement the various projects in their localities with the full participation of the local people by constituting Grama Sabhas (Peoples’ Forum). It is called the “Peoples’ Planning Campaign”(Peoples’ Participatory Programme—PPP for Local Level Self-Governance). The management of all the resources including the local natural resources was largely decentralized to the level of local communities and villages. Integrated, sustainable coastal zone management has become the concern of the local population.

The paper assesses the socio-economic impact of the centrally enforced CRZ and the state sponsored PPP on the coastal community in Kerala and suggests measures to improve the system and living standards of the coastal people within the framework of CRZ.

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1. Introduction

Awareness on sustainable development of the coastal belts for humanity is on the increase [1,2]. Like in several coastal countries, many coastal zones of India too have fragile ecosystems and these continue to degrade due to human interference. Kerala state, a narrow strip of land with a mean width of only 67 km is bordered by the Arabian Sea on the west and the Western Ghats on the east (Fig. 1). The total length of coastline is 560 km. Kerala has some 6250 sq km of brackish water area including marshes, backwaters, mangroves, inter and sub-tidal zones. This is a good feeding and nursery ground for a variety of commercially important fish, prawns, crabs and several marine organisms. These waters are also used extensively for inland transportation and were once blessed with mangroves. The state has a population of 31 million as per the latest census (2001). As most people live in the coastal area, population pressure is even higher and economic and subsistence activity infringe on the environmental quality of the region.

1.1. Coastal zone management

The Government of India, in 1991, issued a major notification under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, framing rules for regulation of various coastal zone activities. These rules are called the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) rules. Under these Rules, the entire coastal stretch from the lowest low tide to highest high tide line and the coastal land within 500 m from the high tide line on the landward side is termed as CRZ. The latter is classified into four categories depending on the sensitivity of the zones. Prohibited and regulated activities have been listed for each zone.

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