

Closing the Gap in Social Safety Nets for Fishing Communities

Gulf of Mannar, Tamil Nadu

The government of Tamil Nadu has introduced welfare schemes for fishermen living below the poverty line. This includes providing financial support during lean months under the National Savings-cum - Relief Scheme and providing assistance in construction of pucca houses under the Fishermen Free Housing Scheme. However, a study in seven villages in the Gulf of Mannar, Tamil Nadu, found that gaps exist in the community availing of these safety nets:

- The money received by fishermen during lean months is not reaching their families as the fishermen are misusing received funds on alcohol consumption and gambling.
- Only half the fishermen are beneficiaries to pucca houses allocated under the government's Free Fishermen Housing Scheme

Recommendations

The study highlights simple steps that the government can take to close the gap in implementing welfare schemes. This includes action by Panchayati Raj Institutions and the Fisheries Department.

- ✓ Create awareness of the process of availing benefits of the requisite welfare schemes at the community level through panchayat offices.
- ✓ The selection of beneficiaries under the Fishermen Free Housing Scheme, taking place at the Gram Sabha, to be approved by the Panchayat.
- ✓ The selected beneficiary list should be displayed in Panchayat offices and Fisheries department offices.
- ✓ A joint account in the name of both husband and wife to be created for deposit of relief amount with direct bank transfer ensuring that relief money reaches the fishermen family.

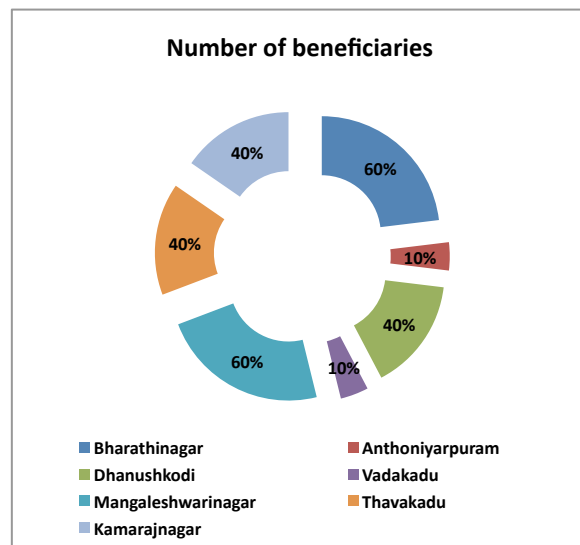
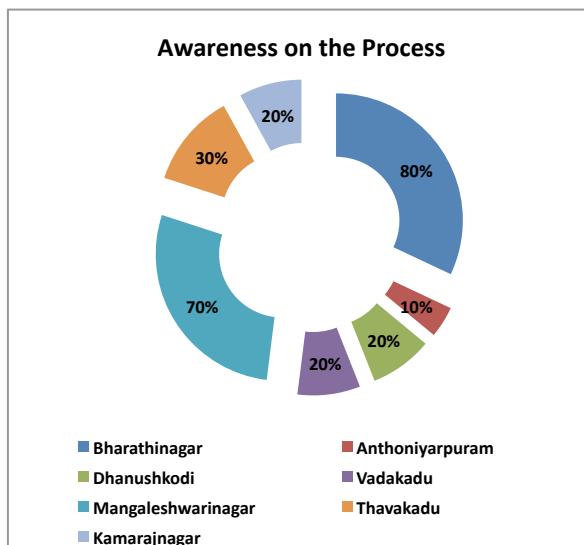


Figure 1: Vadakadu Village

This study of welfare schemes for the fishermen in seven villages of Gulf of Mannar was conducted using Public Affairs Centre (PAC)'s *Climate Change Score Card*. The highlights from the score card revealed that the level of awareness about the National Savings Cum Relief scheme and the Fishermen Free Housing scheme is quite high among community members. When enrolled members were asked to score the schemes in terms of their own awareness of the process of availing the benefits, as well as benefits received, there was a stark difference in scores between villages. *Anthonyapuram, Dhanushkodi, Vadakadu, Mangaleshwarinagar, Thavakadu and Kamarajnagar*, for instance, had the least awareness of the process of how to avail

benefits. These results led to our discovery that only 50% of the Fishing community in the mentioned seven villages were benefitted from the Fishermen Free Housing scheme.

The Government introduced the National Relief – Cum- Savings scheme as a means to provide sustenance during monsoon months as marine fishermen are unable to venture into the sea for fishing. The government pays Rs 1800 per month for an enrolled fisherman to sustain himself during lean periods. But, according to our findings, the money received by the fishermen under the benefits scheme is not ultimately reaching his family as the fishermen are wasting funds on alcohol consumption and gambling.



The objectives of welfare schemes implemented in terms of uplifting these marginalized fishermen, and the providing them with a safety net to rely upon when there is a need, can be achieved through an effective IEC strategy which achieves the following:

- Awareness on government welfare scheme done at the community-level through panchayat offices
- The selection of Beneficiaries to take place at the Gram Sabha and is approved by the Panchayat
- The selected beneficiary lists should be displayed in Panchayat offices and Fisheries department offices.



These findings are part of the study 'Enhancing Community Centred Governance in Gulf of Mannar' conducted by Public Affairs Centre. The complete report is available at www.pacindia.org

Climate Change Score Card is a tool that connects livelihoods and local environment with governance structure. More details on the tool is available at www.pacindia.org

Public Affairs Centre (PAC) is a not-for-profit organization, established in 1994 that is dedicated to improving the quality of governance in India. The focus of PAC is on identifying areas where citizens and civil society organizations can play a