Beyond 'Rehabilitation': Local Governments and Restoring the Lives of Displaced People in the Coast of the Thiruvananthapuram District

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Approach

This policy dialogue is about the plight of the coastal community of the district of Thiruvananthapuram, struck repeatedly by natural disasters, and disastrous human intervention. Over the past decade, the community has faced continuous loss of resources, both at the sea and on land, perhaps to an unprecedented extent. We focus, especially, on the fisher families that have lost their habitations due to the continuous erosion of the coast and still live in makeshift 'camps' away from the coast, whose rights to development are still a faraway dream. We try to reflect on how these may be restored, on how the framework of Kerala's panchayati raj may be expanded in ways that strengthen the coastal community and their presence on the coast.

Introduction

About half of Kerala's densely populated coastline has long been susceptible to large-scale sea erosion. The region has been facing the brunt of rapid erosion coupled with a growing population, necessitating widespread displacement. Over the last 25 years, 45 per cent of Kerala's coastline has been experiencing varied degrees of erosion, noted a 2021 study conducted by the National Center for Coastal Research (NCCR). The research attributed erosion to the improper construction of structures, sand mining, changes in the monsoon, and global warming-induced sea level rise. Some 15 kilometres of coastline in the State is at risk of erosion as highlighted in a study conducted in 2022 by the National Center for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS). The coastal regions of the Kannur, Kochi, Alappuzha, and Kasaragod districts are

identified as being at high risk by the Coastal Vulnerability Index (CVI) of INCOIS[1]. They are susceptible to natural disasters like tsunamis, high tides, coastal erosion, and sea level rise. Nearly 53 km of the state's coastline is vulnerable, and another 243 km is semi-vulnerable, the study stated.[2]

In general, there is academic consensus that Kerala's ecological stability is now seriously threatened[3]. The ecological issues of the state's coastal zones are distinct and mitigation efforts have to be taken at war footing to prevent further losses. Kerala has a unique topography which slopes between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea from east to west. People here are somehow connected with rivers and the sea. Forty-one of the 44 rivers in the state flow westwards and fall into the Arabian Sea. The state's coastline spans about 590 km in 9 districts — about 10 per cent of India's total coastal area. About 30 per cent of Kerala's population lives in coastal areas, which comprise a meagre 15 per cent of the state's total area, making it densely populated. The general population density of the state is an average of 859 per square kilometre, while the coastal area houses an average of 2022 people in a square kilometre. According to the 2019-20 Census, the population of fishing communities in Kerala is 10, 44,36l. Of them, 8, 00,165 (77 per cent) are fishermen; 98 per cent are traditional fishermen. More than half of families here are below the poverty line.

Until the 1960s, the fisher community in Kerala were engaged in traditional occupations such as fishing, fish marketing, net weaving, manufacturing of fishing

[1] https://incois.gov.in/documents/ITCOocean/Coastal_Vulnerability_Mapping.pdf, accessed on 1 May 2023
[2] ibid
[3] Preet Lal, et.al, (2020) Evaluating the 2018 extreme flood hazard events in Kerala, India, Remote Sensing Letters, 11:5, 436-445,

equipment, fish processing etc. The mechanisation projects implemented in Kerala in the 1960s adversely affected traditional occupations, the marine ecosystem, and the environment. With the advent of mechanisation, fishing equipment required huge investment and mechanisation. The introduction of mechanised net weaving, the expansion of fish processing factories and the entry of large companies in the field of fish marketing have led to the loss of jobs for women in the fishing sector[4]. The competition in fish marketing has adversely affected the economic status of women. Since buying fish requires an initial investment, fisher women have to borrow money at exorbitant interest rates. This has adversely affected the family income of the people here. They live in a state of complete insecurity and inconvenience and bear the brunt of natural calamities such as recurrent cyclones, sea storms and tsunamis. The academic literature on Kerala's coastal communities has examined the various facets of their social exclusion as well as extensively documented their economic marginalizing during a time when fishing grew into a major venture in Kerala's commercial sector.

The frequency of natural disasters that the coastal people, especially of south Kerala, suffer has undoubtedly increased in the present century. The tsunami of 2004 and several major cyclones have badly affected the community. Besides, this century has also seen the unprecedented rise of unscientific construction activities in the sea and

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[4] Pryck, Jennie Dey de(2013), Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome; Rajan, J.B.(2022) Development or Displacement, Snapshots from Small Scale Fisheries in Kerala, Kerala Institute of Local Administration

URL:
http://dspace.kila.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/600/2/Development%20or%20Displacement-%20Fisheries.pdf accessed on April 17, 2022

coast, especially in the Thiruvananthapuram district. This includes early constructions of fishing harbours, the coming of luxury hotels and resorts (following the rise of tourism as the 'sunrise sector' in Kerala's economy during the 1990s and after), and at present, the highly-controversial Vizhinjam port, being constructed by Adani Ports Ltd. A significant section of the scientific community as well as a large number of fishers who have accumulated knowledge of fishing in the coastal waters of Thiruvananthapuram believe these to be causing much of sea erosion and coastal erosion. Coastal nourishment systems[5] are adopted globally to combat coastal erosion owing to harbour construction[6], while there is no such scheme in Kerala.

It is to be noted that despite the fact that the government of Kerala has explicitly acknowledged the extreme deprivation of the coastal communities from the 1950s, and noted the deepening poverty and want among them despite the expansion of fisheries as an industry in the subsequent decades. Innumerable livelihood projects, housing projects, support for education, and so on have been announced each year for the fishing community as support for 'backward communities' from the 1960s onwards. But it appears that gains from these have been minimal — and further, given

[5] Coastal or beach nourishment is a mechanism of adding sediment artificially to coasts where erosion causing a threat of loss of land fill and subsequent storm and high wave threat to the eco-system and livelihood at the coastal area. Recent studies suggest on different practices around the world pointing towards the use of coastal nourishment techniques can be used as a soft strategy to ensure that marine eco-system maintained and bio-diversity on the coastal areas are preserved.

[6] Davison, A. Todd., Robert J. Nicholls and Stephen P. Leatherman.,(1992), Beach Nourishment as a Coastal Management Tool: An Annotated Bibliography on Developments Associated with the Artificial Nourishment of Beaches, Journal of Coastal Research, Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 984-1022; and Staudt, Franziska. et.al., (2021), The sustainability of beach nourishments: a review of nourishment and environmental monitoring practice, J Coast Conserv 25, 34 URL: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11852-021-00801-y Accessed on 28th April 2023

the present challenges mentioned above, they are either inadequate or mismatched, or devised without any serious consultation or participation. Not surprisingly, then, many projects announced in the name of the safety of the coastal people causes further misery to the fisher community.

Particularly relevant to the present discussion on the displaced families on the coast of the Thiruvananthapuram district is the fact that coastal people in Kerala have the least access to land rights. Irrespective of the fact that some among the fishing community may have benefited – especially on the Thiruvananthapuram coast – from the housing schemes implemented there, for example in the 1980s, the lack of socio-economic upward mobility among the majority of coastal people erodes these resources rapidly. As was evident in our interviews with affected families, land and houses are usually used as collateral to meet urgent financial needs like education, treatment of illness, marriage and purchase of employment equipment. Further, some of these resources do not fit the lives of these people, for example, housing offered in areas removed from the coast.. People living in this coastal area are still primarily involved in fishing and marketing. The community's way of life, culture, and social relations are related to the sea, making it difficult for them to relocate to far-off places.

An excellent illustration of the above is the Punargeham housing project[7]. Despite excellent intentions,, it makes the fisher families, its beneficiaries, landless. The policy so far followed by the government is that people in the coastal area only need a

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[7] The project 'punargaeham' was implemented as a rehabilitation scheme in all the coastal districts
of the States for rehabilitating the residents living within 50m from HTL (High Tide Line). Relocating into housing colonies outside the coastal areas was criticised by coastal communities as an arbitrary and would affects the livelihood of the fish folk communities.

place to live rather than land rights, even in a limited way, turning their living space into nothing more than a shelter – and one that has only use value, and no exchange value. There is considerable worry about the upkeep and renovation of these homes, and the risk of 'slummification', and worse, their ghettoization, as they are moved to locations dominated by non-coastal people[8]. There is the risk of these flats turning into 'colonies' – historically, housing for the poor in Kerala do not enjoy social respectability and acceptance despite being state-funded and –planned. These areas, designated 'colonies' are still abjected spaces, identified with crime and waste[9].   That such risk exists on the coast also is evident from the fact that the housing that was constructed for coastal families after the tsunami is now referred to commonly as the 'tsunami colonies'. The derogatory connotations of such names clash with the self-perceptions of the fisher community which continues to regard itself as a self-supporting social group (it is not a coincidence that despite much hardship, women from these communities have resisted the pull towards domestic labour on the mainland until very recent times). .

This has serious political consequences. Historically, the community has been the basis for successful mobilisation against resource predation by commercial fisheries in the 1980s and afterward; scattering families for 'rehabilitation' will undermine the community. Precisely because the resources available in such housing 'colonies' are actually limited, the competition for these is likely to create internal rifts, especially

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[8] Williams G, Omanakuttan U, Devika J, et al. (2019) Planning a 'slum free' Trivandrum: Housing upgrade and the rescaling of urban governance in India. Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space 37(2): 256–276

[9] Devika, J., 2014. Deprivation, Abjection, and Dispossession: Social Disadvantage in Early 21st Century. Economic and Political Weekly , OCTOBER 18, 2014, Vol. 49, No. 42 (OCTOBER, 49(42), pp. 73-80.

because commons like beaches are no longer available for family and community ceremonies or functions. This is likely to affect the livelihoods of women engaged in fish-curing and drying, as they will lack the open space of the beach.

Thirdly, this is likely to affect the livelihoods of fishers, as they themselves have pointed out quite vocally. Being close to the beach is non-negotiable for small, traditional fishers who have to watch the changes in the sea and the availability of catch; deep sea fishers who arrive at night/dawn will have to seek transportation to reach their homes. The Punargeham project does not take any of these eventualities into consideration.

The construction of Vizhinjam Adani Port seems to be intensifying an already-acute environmental crisis in the Thiruvananthapuram district. However, this does not mean that the coastal areas of the other districts are free of threat. The coastal areas of Kollam and Alappuzha districts, like Alapad[10] and Thottappally[11] are being washed away by unregulated and unscientific black sand mining. Climate-change-related coastal erosion threatens parts of coastal Kochi like Vypeen[12]. However, Chellanam, part of the same coastal Kochi, is in the news for decades as a remnant of the so-called

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[10] Ahameed, K.K. Basheer., Arvind Chandra Pandey., (2019), Impact of Marine Sand Mining on Coastal Morphology: A Case Study on Alappad Coast, Kerala, Proceedings of the Ocean Society of India Conference (OSICON–19), CMLRE (MoES), Kochi, 12-14 December, 2019; URL: https://d197for5662m48.cloudfront.net/documents/publicationstatus/111415/preprint_pdf/50fcb72539326c95c39ebbd3f627c798.pdf accessed on 29th April 2023

[11] Nallusamy, Babu ,(2016), Environmental Related Issues along Kayamkulam − Thottappally Placer

Deposits, SW Coast, India, Int. j. econ. environ. geol. Vol:7(1) 53-63

[12] See, M Suchitra and Dr K G Sreeja, 'Venalilum Vellam Kayari Mungukayaanu Vaipeen', Mathrubhumi Weekly 35, 100, November 13-19, 2022, 22-33.

'development'--it is part of unscientific dredging by Port Trust[13]. In other words, the security of coastal people all over Kerala is being threatened by not just natural disasters or processes, but also by irresponsible and predatory interventions by the government and corporate/tourism mafias.

Therefore, though the present exercise has focused mainly on the families displaced from the coast of the Thiruvananthapuram district, it may offer some pointers about securing the rights to development that all coastal communities in Kerala enjoy. But we believe that no mechanical inferences or generalizations can be made for other coastal areas from this. Issues on the coast of Kerala differ significantly from area to area, and a policy exercise that seeks to address them effectively will require a detailed state-level democratic exercise. This will have to be one that aims at intensive, open, public dialogue with coastal people taking the lead to gain insight about problems and possible resolutions to them – that goes beyond both the top-down framework of 'consultation' and the condescending concerns of 'rehabilitation' – may have to be organized.

Local Self-Government and the Fisher Communities in Kerala

Though Kerala's fisher people have practiced community-care since long (for example, by making available free shares of the catch to widows and disabled people) and this has actually evolved in time (for example, the building of artificial reefs closer to the shore which, as John Kurien says, worked like a 'living pension fund' to older fishermen) (Kurien 2000), none of these practices informed the formation of panchayati raj institutions for coastal people. Indeed, precisely because fishing

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[13] https://scroll.in/article/888234/coastal-erosion-ravages-700-homes-in-keralas-chellanam-village-eight-months-after-cyclone-ockhi ; Accessed on 29th April 2023

hamlets were rarely separate wards on their own and often amalgamated with mainland areas in ward-formation, issues and concerns of coastal fishers were less audible in the claims-making processes of panchayati raj institutions. This lack of voice seems to be exacerbated in urban areas where beaches are claimed as recreation spaces for urban mainland dwellers. A conception of panchayati raj that goes beyond rational choice and self-interest, which would have made sense to coastal dwellers was simply not available to them. Vulnerability has always been a reality on the coast, and as John Kurien and A. Paul argue, social security for fishers in Kerala post-1980 began to pay more attention to it, mainly as a response to the fish workers agitations of that period (Kurien and Paul).

Nevertheless, the 3rd Schedule of the Grama Panchayat Act (1994) laid out the sectoral functions of the Grama Panchayats (GP), and these included:

1. Development of Fish culture in ponds, Pisciculture in fresh water and brackish water and Mariculture.
2. Improvement of fish seed production and distribution of offspring.
3. Distribution of fishing implements.
4. Provide assistance for Fish marketing.
5. Provide basic facilities for fish workers' families.
6. Implementation of Fisherman welfare scheme. (KILA 2017: 2)

Both welfare and productive activities were to be under the GP. Fisheries was to have its own Working Group composed of persons competent in this field, and it was to be actively discussed in the Development and Welfare Standing Committee meetings. The local plan was to be developed with central and state allocations to fisheries integrated in it. Aqua culture was to receive high priority, with the formation of

Aqua culture clubs and leasing out of ponds etc. The GP was to convene the neighbourhood sabhas as well as the Matsya Sabhas. Further, the administration of the Matsya Bhavan, which is a common institution for the disbursement of services and benefits of the many different government agencies in the Fisheries Sector[14], is fully under the GP, with the Matya Bhavan Officer, designated by the Department of Fisheries, functioning under the GP as the Implementing Officer of the GP. Almost all responsibilities to do with the fisheries sector and coastal peoples' welfare are handled by the Matsya Bhavan including the council meetings of such key projects as Theeramythri (KILA 2017: 2-9).

It was noted early on that the Matsya Bhavans lacked community connect. The Matsya Sabha was to support and monitor its activities under the leadership of elected members and make sure that interested individuals and organizations participate (ibid. p. 5). However, the Task Force on Livelihood Secure Fishing Communities of the Kerala State Planning Board (GOK, 1997) suggested that five committees, consisting of members of fisher communities be created for each Matsya Bhavan so that the institution was strengthened and hopefully subject to democratic scrutiny, by a direct community connect. It was hoped that this would enhance people's role in decision-making in fishery schemes. The committees recommended were to do with (1) Sea-safety (2) Housing, water, sanitation and public health (3) Education and alternative employment and (4) Women's employment.

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[14] Including Department of Fisheries, Matsyafed, Matsya Board and Fish Farmers Development Agencies (FFDA), Society for Assistance to Fisher Women (SAF), Kerala State Coastal Development Corporation (KSCDC), Agency for Development of Aquaculture Kerala (ADAK), Fisheries Resource Management Society (FIRMA) etc.

While the bureaucratic machinery to address issues of the coastal community seems adequately developed, recent research seems to point to its inadequacy to meet imminent challenges. Gopika (forthcoming) points this about the Karumkulam panchayath in the Thiruvananthapuram district, which has 12 coastal wards out of a total of 18. Given the preponderance of coastal wards, one would expect a fair degree of prioritisation of coastal people in its planning. However, it appears that was not the case from its earliest days. Examining the Panchayat Development Report of Karumkulam, she notes that it takes little note of the relative irrelevance of land-centric borders for the fisher people and that it contains nothing about the marine ecology, fishing practices, or its history (Gopika, ibid. p. 14). But perhaps more importantly, she argues that the very idea of welfare is ossified – into a set of largely individual- or family-directed 'doles' that are promotional or protective in nature, administered by the panchayat, incapable of the flexibility needed to deal with a calamity like Ockhi. She writes:

> Cyclone Okhi was not even discussed in the panchayat committee meetings except for the travel spending of panchayat president to visit Thiruvananthapuram Medical College to identify one fisherman who lost his life. The acceptance of inability of the local government to enquire or engage with such 'large scale issues' beyond their capacity to assess or intervene normalise the futility of politicising such encounters artisanal fisher face in Sea. Over the period, local has become vulnerable to all possible threats from climate change and human interventions, yet the inability to intervene got normalised institutionally. This has severely affected the spaces of participation as well. (ibid. p. 16)

The most talked-about schemes, she notes, are of 'clean' housing and educational support. While these are highly valuable, they are not "different from the colonial modernisation approach to development; in fact, it is the same. Through hegemonic and bureaucratic facilitation, modernisation is promoted without giving any concern for the local as a space with its own geographic, historical and political specificities." (p 16). She remarks that meanwhile, in her interviews with panchayat members and other notables in the panchayat, the fish workers are still referred to as 'crude', 'quarrelsome', 'aggressive' and so on – they continued to be 'othered', that is (ibid. p.5). Adding to this is the fact that there is considerable social fragmentation of the fisher community there, and the younger generation increasingly looks for less-stigmatized work on the mainland. Still, probably because of the benefits available, many young men who were of the community but did not engage in fishing, requested Gopika to include them in her 'survey' as 'fish workers'. This can considerably complicate the prospects of benefits reaching actual fishers and their families. Gopika's fieldwork also captured the dynamics of economic differentiation and social fragmentation within the fishing community and the ways in which this affected welfare distribution. Fisher families which had improved their economic status through Gulf migration and other means sought to capture power in the GP, securing benefits for their supporters (ibid. p. 26). Members of the community who are not fishers often receive compensation for loss of craft and avail benefits multiple times, while those who have actually suffered losses but lack the right connections remain uncompensated (ibid. p.44)

Besides, it appeared that both the Grama Sabha and the Matsya Sabha in the Karumkulam panchayat were in grievous disarray (ibid. p 33). In the

Development seminar she attended, Gopika reports, the fisheries working group was woefully small, composed of just two members of a civil social organisation (students), herself, and the co-ordinator of the workin group, an officer of the Department of Fisheries, with two women joining later. The coordinator kept cautioning that new projects can be only of existing heads, and new suggestions may not be approved by the District Planning Committee.

Gopika's account of Karumkulam from her fieldwork in 2020 resonates quite strongly with our observations from interviews as well as the research on the state's pandemic interventions in the coastal villages of Thiruvananthapuram (Osella and Jament 2021). The government's high-handed approach to fishermen in Thiruvananthapuram, on the pretext to forcing them to comply with the restrictions during the lockdown led to massive discontent and conflict in the coastal areas. Interestingly enough, the community's unimpaired skills and ability to take live-saving decisions without plodding from higher authorities, besides their value-system that emphasizes generosity, was well-evident during the massive floods that drowned most of Kerala in 2018[15]. However, it was deeply disappointing that though Kerala's fisher community won international applause, this does not seem to have even dented the othering of them by the state and civil society in Kerala.[16] During the pandemic, no measures that were designed to address the specific needs of the fisher folk were announced; no effort was made

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[15] See, https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/don-t-want-money-we-want-save-lives-say-fishermen-rescuing-people-kerala-86746, accessed 18 April 2023.
[16] Evident in the crude and aggressive manner in which the government sought to quell 'insubordination' in the coastal village of Pootnhura of Thiruvananthapuram, where alleged disrespect of pandemic restrictions led to the army being called out for a flag-march. Also see, https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/india/kerala-flood-fishermens-ingenuity-help-save-1000s-of-lives-then-they-were-promptly-ignored-1.2274365 , accessed 18 April 2023.

to speed up relief to the already-beleagured displaced families which now had to bear the brunt of the pandemic in badly-organized, crowded, insanitary 'camps'.

Most importantly, in this policy dialogue, we seek to bring focus on coastal people who live in city wards. The present discussion focuses on the fisher families displaced from Thiruvananthapuram's coast after the Ockhi cyclone of 2017.

We have done the fieldwork in the three coastal wards of Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, where the impact of Ockhi was severe, and subsequent environmental disasters have substantially affected the coastal areas. Vizhinjam, Beemapally and Beemapally East wards were selected for the field survey since there are families from these wards still living in the camps or leaving with relatives after they have been affected by the disasters. We interviewed 27 community members, four volunteers, six corporation councillors and five officials between December 2022 to March 2023. These conversations happened in the thick of the anti-Adani Ports agitation in Thiruvananthapuram. This made fieldwork very difficult. Most officials and many elected councillors as well as Kudumbashree local leaders were very wary of speaking with researchers in a highly-polarized environment. Many of them were negotiating a difficult dilemma, torn between their community roots and political affiliations. Indeed, it told us much about how local governance has been relegated into near-insignificance in a crisis in which people's interests were pitched against that of a major corporate.

We believe that the State government's neglect of local self-government, of its capacity to support coastal people and those affected by the controversial port

project, is a grave mistake. Neglecting local government – or keeping it subservient to political parties in power in a way that silenced representatives of the community – can only erode the State government's standing with local communities, in this case, with coastal communities. Such loss of trust will affect the success of any major development intervention planned on the coast.

In the camps the insecurities and occupational, economic, social and health crises pre-existing, and created by, the lockdown were intense. As mainly workers in the unorganized sector, women from the fisher community had to work hard to maintain their families' health and food security.

The conditions in disaster management camps in the Coastal areas of Trivandrum and the experience of the people who stayed in these camps have a significant role in the preparedness and prevention of disasters in the future. There were five camps in the aftermath of Ockhi, and two camps were closed within three months, and people managed to return home. One camp has functioned for four years, and one continues to operate today.

Forty-three families are remaining in the New Godown camp presently. From a two-month-old child to people in their eighties are living in the camp for five years. Each family gets approximately ten square feet of a tin shed. During the interviews, people in the camp have said that they have no privacy in the camp. Privacy while changing the dress or feeding the infant doesn't exist in these camps.

Below, we propose a policy approach to addressing the issues of the displaced families. While this is focused on a specific site, the coast of Thiruvananthapuram, it

may be of relevance to future instances of coastal displacement elsewhere in Kerala as well. It dwells essentially on the additions and changes to the panchayati raj framework through which the right to development of people displaced due to natural calamities and irresponsible human intervention.

Need for Change in the Overall Policy Approach Towards Disaster Management on the Coast

Due to its vulnerability to extreme weather vagaries, disaster management in Kerala's coastal regions differs from other areas. As noted earlier, natural disasters are now no longer an exceptional phenomenon for the communities here. The increased frequency and unique characteristics and nature of the disasters demand a futuristic approach for risk mitigation as well as long-term rehabilitation of the community. Preparedness should be based on the current situation as well as the potential environmental disasters the communities in the coastal area would face in the future. The erosion of the coast and uninhabitable situation also need to be considered while formulating a policy to deal with disasters.

Most importantly, the effects of frequent dislocation and destruction of livelihood due to disasters and their effects on different categories of people, such as the elderly, children, women and the disabled, as well as on the stability of the community itself are important concerns that should be considered in responsive policy-making. By 'responsive policy-making' we mean policy that is based on actual inputs from the community that endures natural disasters, and not merely those of disaster management agencies. Such policy aims for long-term stability rather than short-term alleviation of distress. It seeks flexibility and participation over bureaucratic rules and

top-down solutions. These suggestions are presented below separately in broad categories, but are interconnected and complementary to each other.

We believe that more wide-ranging changes in policy at the state and national levels are necessary for the long-term resolution of the crisis in the micro-site that we are concerned with here at present, the coast of the Thiruvananthapuram district. For example, the current understanding of disasters as isolated events needs an overhaul. No state-level body is directly answerable to Kerala State Legislative Assembly besides State Disaster Management Authority. An initiative to form a department or a subsidiary department allows the Legislative Assembly to be a body where questions related to disaster and policies are concerned. Secondly, the central role accorded to the Revenue department in disaster management can be questioned in the light of recent experiences from Kerala. However, shifting the responsibility from the Revenue Department to local governments is a larger policy-frame change that should happen at the higher levels of government.

I.   New Research

Needless to say, a primary requirement of such policy-making is usable information that reflects both the ecological and social challenges on the ground. Below we highlight an agenda for such research. .

1. Data on coastal communities is plentiful but very often unreliable and conflicting. A research action group needs to be formed at the State-level to examine the worth of the extant data sources as well as secondary research into coastal communities in Kerala and the impact of climate change on them. Secondary research on the Kerala coast is copious; the research action group

should (a) provide as assessment of the data sets of the various government agencies dealing with fisheries and identify shortcomings and the reasons for such shortcomings (b) prepare a thorough review of the available literature and point out the relevant research gaps, and (c) devise ways in which these data/research gaps may be filled with the active participation of students and other interested participants from the respective coastal community. The Thiruvananthapuram coast has many vibrant organizations of educated youth like the Coastal Students' Forum; there are also experienced researchers and college teachers from the community who evince a keen interest in its past and present who may be invited to participate in these activities.

2. Some of the research gaps mentioned above are well-evident already. We point out three of these: (a) it is already established in the research literature that the nature of households and family arrangements are different in the coastal region compared to other areas. There is a need to study the difference in the coastal demography and the changing livelihood patterns to understand the community and initiate policy responses to crises unique to the area. Much of the welfare resources offered in the past including housing schemes, seemed to have ignored these crucial aspects, resulting in their failure or inadequacy. (b) Coastal communities in Kerala at present are being deeply affected by the galloping urbanisation of the State; a sizeable number of coastal people now live in urban areas. Traditionally, fisheries have been associated with rural development. Shifting focus to fisher communities living under urban conditions is an urgent need at present. More precise and usable data on such communities is absolutely necessary for responsive policy-

making. The research available on the coastal villages of Thiruvananthapuram is plentiful compared with other coastal areas in Kerala; however, the above exercises are still relevant in its context as well.

3. Shrinking resources and other livelihood options for coastal communities demands a deeper analysis of the nature of the interconnection between the coastal community and others, as more and more young people from the coast engage in occupations other than fishing. Fieldwork by researchers among coastal communities in the Thiruvananthapuram district shows that many benefits due to fisher people are often actually enjoyed by members of the community who are non-fishers, who have connections with local politicians powerful in the local panchayat. The need for more data in this case is not to remove such people as welfare recipients; besides the fact that such an inquiry might help fishers who have suffered losses actually to receive compensation etc., it may also help in the re-allocation of resources within the community, directing more of it towards ameliorating the effects of displacement due to natural disasters, immediate or happening over time. The loss of employment among the community members causes an indirect crisis for those living outside the coastal belt: the most telling instance that illustrated this was the dismay that we sensed among shop owners in the Beemappally area and elsewhere. They noted that the depletion of fish catch is affecting these community-centred marketplaces badly, reducing sales.

4. The research group should be supported by special and expanded district-wise Matsya Sabhas which will involve all the local bodies with coastal wards, and also draw in powerful community organisations like the Catholic Church

and the mosque committees. These Sabhas, conceived of as open forums, need to be convened in periodic intervals to take stock of the ecological and social changes to update existing knowledge, announced well in advance, with an agenda designed in and through panchayat-level Matsya Sabhas. Special arrangements need to be put in place for Matsya Sabhas in the urban wards too, wherever necessary. The District Panchayat could be made responsible for the convening of the district-level Matsya Sabha at the necessary intervals.

II.   Responsive, Effective Governance

1. In the event of a disaster or warning of an environmental disaster, the present law requires governmental departments like the Police and Revenue to assume the major role in all four aspects of disaster management. Local governments work as mainly under these departments, mainly as the community interface with government departments. However, as we have learned from both the floods of 2018 and the pandemic, people respond well to institutions familiar and proximate to them. It is beyond doubt that during these crises, it was the local governments that functioned as the pivotal institution at the local level with people turning to it more for support. In the coastal areas of Thiruvananthapuram, the role played by the civil society there – the Catholic Church and the Muslim leadership – is important. In other words, in the coastal areas, local governments along with civil society leadership should have an important say in managing rescue and relief. The

local government should have adequate representation in the District Disaster Management Committee equally.

2. Given that disasters now last longer and people require more time to pick up the threads of their lives, our imagination of relief and temporary shelter needs to move from short-term life-saving to that of building liveable community-lives within new – and strained –circumstances. This calls for a people-centric approach to disaster management on the coast; this must replace the present bureaucrat-controlled approach. In the experience of the presently-displaced communities, our interviewees complained about both the lackadaisical and irresponsible responses of the fisheries bureaucracy as well as their general apathy. This is confirmed by available research on the functioning of the fisheries bureaucracy on the coast of Thiruvananthapuram. The government's efforts to build disaster-preparedness on the coast must, therefore, operate through social institutions, establishing social protocols to be followed by them in the event of disasters. The role of coastal women in quite central in this; however, adding further to their already-unbearable burdens may not be a viable move. Instead, inclusively-designed women's committees in temporary camps should have real power to make decisions – they should not be merely free labour to implement decisions from above.

3. It is undeniable that the effective circulation of information and the elimination of fake news are absolutely vital during all stages of disaster management. It is also vital to a people-centric approach, to make sure that information reaches the displaced and the affected in a timely way. To this end, district panchayats should create a committee consisting of

representatives of the media, of all branches, in each district to ensure the prompt and correct reporting of unfolding events and the activities of governmental and other agencies. This committee can also function as a forum which interacts directly with the affected and displaced people and mediates between them and the higher authorities whenever necessary.

4. In meeting the needs of the displaced community that must be met externally, it is impossible to deny the vast role that local governments can and must play (we elaborate this aspect as a separate set of suggestions later). Temporary relief camps should be set up closer to the site from which people have been evacuated, rather than further – in the same ward if possible, or in adjacent wards, at least, so that the displaced can be served by familiar people, for example, the same ASHA worker or elected representatives. Elected representatives at the local level must be granted an important role in leading the displaced families and initiating a process by which they are able to recreate healthy community living in the temporary camps. District coordination committees also should be designed so that elected representatives lead the body. This will allow the affected people as well as the displaced to raise questions directly and seek answers from the elected representatives through different forums. Secondly, the key presence of civil society, often of a religious nature, is a reality on the coast which cannot be simply ignored or wished away. Instead of ignoring them, sincere effort needs to be made to invite their participation as both consultative and monitoring agencies during natural disasters.

5. There is a need to form a corpus fund at the state level, which can be requested and accessed by the local governments, both urban and rural, in the case of disasters. Availability of resources is necessary to ensure that local governments are able to play a significant role in disaster management. It is also necessary to incorporate local bodies at block and district levels in the planning and coordination of disaster management. The grama panchayats and urban bodies should be assisted by any of these institutions based on the volume and affected area of disaster. This is especially important because administrative boundaries are often irrelevant in the event of natural calamity.

6. On the coast, the current system responds to disaster by evacuating the community from the location to safer spaces. After a designated time fixed by the guidelines, the authorities allow the evacuees to return to their houses. The current policy of setting up make-shift camps is for 14-45 days. Unlike floods and other hazards, environmental disasters in coastal areas impact buildings and structures differently. Though some families can go back to their homes, from our conversations, it seemed evident that most cannot afford this Returning to their homes takes more than the designated time for such families, and it depends on the extent of damage suffered by the dwellings as well as the ability of the owners to repair them minimally at least so that they are fit for occupation. This ability differs among affected people; families with greater social capital and political networks are more able than families with less of these. The latter are more likely to have more female members or those in need of constant/physical care. There is a need to set up

temporary homes to accommodate those who are unable to return home. Such facilities should shelter them until their houses are restored to liveable conditions.

7. It also warrants that the government has to formulate policies and procedures to assess the situation and make alternative arrangements, if necessary. The state government must create a set of guidelines on the basis of which local bodies can create beneficiary lists of deserving families/individuals who need temporary housing, monitored and affirmed by civil society organizations. Research on welfare distribution benefits in the coastal panchayats in Thiruvananthapuram indicates that there is manipulation of the lists in favour of the better-connected, even among the poor. Projects like Punargeham should include building temporary shelter-homes to accommodate particularly vulnerable families for a certain number of months.

8. Since disasters are a reality on the coast, all large public buildings in coastal wards as well as wards adjacent to coastal wards should be equipped in such a way that they may be converted into temporary shelters for the displaced people, and/or service centres for the affected, at short notice. In Kerala, and in Thiruvananthapuram in particular, we find that the ongoing construction boom has also involved the building of massive wedding-halls, community halls, and so on, as well as huge halls constructed for religious and commercial purposes. The town planning department, or other relevant government departments, should be tasked with coming up with mandatory basic design requirements that allow the above-mentioned conversion of

these halls into temporary shelters during natural calamities. Building rules should be amended to include special clauses applicable to such wards, which insist on building plans conforming to these design requirements for the grant of the necessary licenses. The government must also fix and announce a reasonable rent to be paid to the owners of such halls, as well as incentives and compensation for damage, when they are required for public use.

9. In our conversations with stakeholders, the building of facilities and daily maintenance of camps to keep them liveable was identified as a thorny issue. Immediate measures that make it possible for local governments to mobilize and make available MNREGS and Ayyankali Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme for the building of necessary facilities in the camps and for carrying out the necessary day to day cleaning and other are called for. The possibility of revising the rules of these programmes to permit people moved into camps to access this state-guaranteed employment in labour meant for the setting up and maintenance of these camps should be discussed. Also, the government should initiate an urgent dialogue with civil society on the coast to draw up an agreed list of immediate services necessary for the proper upkeep of the temporary camps to which the latter can and will make a contribution whenever the need arises.

10. In Kerala, school buildings are the space most preferred for setting up a temporary shelter. In Thiruvananthapuram, huge controversies erupted around the eviction of displaced people from a school, the St Roch's Convent at Thoppu, which was their temporary shelter, provoking furious exchanges between those who sided with the displaced and others who pointed to the

considerable loss of schooling suffered by local children (mentioned by Magline Peter, who intervened in this crisis). From our fieldwork, it appears that as natural disasters on the coast becomes more frequent and prolonged, using the school building as temporary shelter for threatened communities severely stresses children's education. This, we note, is a disadvantage to both the displaced and the affected people. A people-centred approach has to ensure that the impact of disasters on children stays minimal. The disaster, like any other important event in society, is also an opportunity for community and state institutions to learn. Sharing of knowledge generated through the experiences with disasters by both parties is necessary to frame plans and policies in both the short run and the long run. e. Currently, there is no forum for both parties to come together and share their knowledge and solution. State government should take initiative to organise public forums at different levels, from the grama panchayath to state levels, where people can come together and share their views and experience. Collaborative efforts with environmental NGOs, university and college departments, and the People's Science Movement to document these experiences in a scientific and accessible manner should be initiated alongside. It allows the government and the communities to arrive at a better understanding and allow reasonable coordination among different stakeholders at different levels. In the long run, we need accumulated information about the experience of natural calamities in order to manage them better.

III. Health

Natural disasters in the coastal area bring many health problems to deal with. The immediate physical harm and the long-term physical well-being, on the one hand, and the mental health problems it brings, on the other hand, causes complicated situations for individuals who survive the disaster.

1. The default health response here during emergencies needs to be revisited to understand the crisis of management of health in the region in general. Managing public health during a natural disaster, especially involving evacuation and relocation of the communities, is complex. The response to such situations warrants a deep knowledge of the community to respond effectively. Factors such as the general nature of health problems in the community, the community's response to health workers, and previous experience with the situations, play a part in shaping the response to natural disasters on the ground. Local medical teams with working experience in the area and knowledge of the local community have a huge role in generating a response to urgent medical needs after a disaster hits an area. The following measures can be put in place to ensure that emergencies are dealt with appropriate responses in minimal time and with efficiency

   a) A serious assessment of the adequacy of the numbers of local health care centres is in order. The Kerala coast is thickly populated and it is quite likely that more health centres are necessary in the coastal areas, especially in emergencies. The government at the State and local levels need to conduct an urgent, thorough assessment, and

wherever necessary, fresh facilities have to be created. Very often, existing facilities are found to be less effective because health-care providers who are transferred here from the mainland come bearing prejudices and often perpetuate stigma unwittingly. Therefore the staffing of local health care centres on the coast should be according to a pattern that ensures the presence of a sufficient number of employees from coastal communities especially as key contact points for the sharing of health information.

b) The primary responsibility of organising and monitoring medical camps should be entrusted to local health care centres.

c) ASHA workers should be assigned the responsibility of organizing health-related activities of temporary camps whenever they have to be set up. ASHA workers act as the community's source of information and support mechanisms in normal scenarios; people are used to them. However, the ASHA worker must be necessarily paid extra wages for the extra hours and effort she puts in towards the effective running of the remedial measures.

d) All the primary health centres/Family Health Centres in the coastal areas need to be prepared and equipped to deal with any emergency related to natural calamities. Since we expect the frequency of natural disasters to increase on the coast, it is necessary to ramp up the infrastructure and medicine reserve at local health facilities, create emergency stores of live-saving drugs, to ensure that a proper response can be made in case of any eventuality without any delays.

e) There should be a separate Standard Operating Procedure for natural disasters in coastal areas for all Taluk hospitals, which oversee all the Primary Health Centres in the coastal regions. While the Directorate of Health Services, Kerala, has produced hospital management guidelines to deal with disasters in general, we recommend that a separate SOP for the coastal areas is necessary. This SOP needs to take into account such distinctive features as the high population density on the coast, the particular patterns of habitation, the relatively high vulnerability of the coast, and the relatively high frequency of disasters there. Also, the SOP needs to be fine-tuned to accommodate specificities of particular coastal areas; further, they need to be re-examined and updated with each experience of managing natural disasters. The situations in the coastal region demand a fully functional emergency response system immediately to deal with all the possible eventualities.

f) Since the private sector in health is well-developed and major civil social institutions on the coast including the Catholic Church have made significant contributions to Kerala's health infrastructure and health care accessibility, it may be important to plan and implement emergency response and ensure preparedness with the active participation of these agencies. Not only must be the standard operating procedure for the coastal areas be developed with the direct involvement of private and civil social players in the health sector on the coast, they could be tasked with the responsibility of disseminating the protocols for urgent response and the steps to be

taken for preparedness among the public through, for example, the pedagogic activities of the Church, mosques etc. The fact that the community needs to quickly defend itself and prepare the ground for first responders should never be let out of sight.

2. Continuous care for people who are affected by natural calamities is necessary. Both mental and physical trauma they cause can be mitigated only through a long process of care and continuous intervention.

a) Local healthcare institutions should be equipped and put in charge of caring for the continuous health needs of people at the temporary camps and shelters. Local health facilities, private or public, must be made responsible to to not just provide necessary health care, but also to reach out periodically to those in need. The local government must provide each displaced person a health card that enables them to access health care at facilities in and around the camp soon after evacuation.

b) People who are suffering from long-term illness are likely to be affected most by the disasters and they need immediate support . Such people should be shifted to hospitals for better care wherever possible – and this possibility should be offered as an option to their caregivers. Their need for medical attention should be prioritised and such care should be extended for some time after leaving the shelter until they return to a normal life.

c) All the disasters cause tremendous mental agony to people who go through them. Unlike other disasters, natural calamities

shatter all the social and community protection for the individual and leave them completely insecure and vulnerable. The health department should initiate a comprehensive study on the mental health impact on the community and formulate policy initiatives and action plans to deal with the same.

3. The effects of disasters on different categories of people are different. It is vital to place policies and action plans to ensure that people with certain special needs are not left alone in moments of crisis. For example, the painful loss of two intellectually disabled children and an elderly mother's death in Pandanadu, Chengannur, during the flood of 2018 indicates that such a plan is necessary for any disaster management policy and guidelines. Special attention needs to be paid to the needs of the elderly, people with disability, especially intellectual disabilities, and chronically ill patients care workers should be instructed to prioritise intervention, monitoring, and evaluation of the support offered to them.

a) Primary Health Centres/Family Welfare Centres should maintain a register containing information about people suffering from different kinds of vulnerability, indicating the kinds of support needed in each case. Such a register allows the evacuation teams to evacuate on a priority basis and look for survivors who might have been trapped because of their vulnerability.

b) Health centres, private and public, in and around the coast should be adequately pre-equipped with facilities and

resources to enable and provide necessary medical care for people with disabilities and immobility on a priority basis.

c) The Health Department should organise a village community health organisation and mobilise other community organisations on the coast to ensure the smooth flow of information and to raise volunteers quickly in the event of a disaster in an effective and timely fashion.

5. The impact of a disaster on the mental health of different categories of people in the community would be a serious issue which must be dealt with due diligence. The impacts on mental health vary, and they are usually more severe on the more vulnerable members of coastal communities. This is still an area inadequately addressed. Counselling offered should not be ad hoc, nor should such services be provided by hastily-trained and poorly-paid people. We noted in our interactions that the mental impacts of Ockhi, from some years back now, remain unhealed even today. Perhaps it is apposite to propose a special counselling cell for coastal people in every district on the Kerala coast, staffed with properly-trained counsellors. Effort could be made to select educated young people from the coastal areas interested in a career in psychological support services, for training at professional institutions like NIMHANS, and they could be deployed in local health facilities in and around coastal areas. Schools in coastal areas must also be equipped with counselling facilities. Needless to say, young children are most vulnerable to mental health issues during natural disasters. They must be granted priority in such effort.

IV.   Education

Schools in the coastal area are under tremendous stress due to different social and community conditions. The special circumstances create unique problems for the institutions. Following are some of the immediate interventions necessary to ensure the well-being of the children in the coastal area in the context of the environmental volatility and its effects on the education of the children.

1. As mentioned earlier, schools are the first choice of space for opening up a temporary shelter when there are some social or environmental calamities that hit a society. Accessibility to the institutions, availability, organised and well-maintained space and easy to control are the reasons often cited as reasons to choose schools to be a temporary shelter. The default mechanism of choosing schools as temporary space to relocate affected populations affects communities far deeper in the long-term recovery and sustainability of the community. Pressure on the educational institutions to act as a community centre as and when required in the context of natural calamities affects the educational process of children in the school in coastal areas. It is also important to note in the context that children in the coastal areas depend on public education intuitions for their primary and secondary education, and private educational institutions often come as secondary choices for the administration whenever evacuation processes are planned and executed.

   a) It is important to build alternative mechanisms for evacuation and temporary shelters for the people in the coastal areas since incidents related to the environmental calamities are annual incidents.

Community centres and temporary shelter homes should be built to ensure that educational institutions are not suspending their activities when such incidents happen. Using school buildings to organise a temporary shelter should be made a last resort in an event of environmental disaster at the coastal area.

b) If, as a last resort, schools are used as the temporary shelter, there should be a standard operating procedure put in place elaborating how the buildings and facilities must be put to use, the nature of the institutional mechanism responsible for the shelter, how costs should be calculated and met, and how any damages may be compensated.

c) The SOP should also cover the eventuality of having to hold regular classes in schools made into temporary shelters as the last resort. There should be an institutional and community mechanism – a committee chaired by the elected ward member and including representatives of such important social institutions on the coast as the Catholic Church and mosques, with at least half of the members being from the displaced people -- to run the camps. This committee should also ensure the smooth conduct of classes. Teachers and authorities in the educational department should not be entrusted the responsibility of running the shelter.

d) A clear demarcation should be established between the shelter and school activities to ensure that children feel free and safe at the school.

e) A definite deadline should be fixed to shift the shelter to a different location from the school and a nodal officer should be assigned to be responsible for the shelter to ensure that there is no de facto responsibility falling on the school management committee and school administration.

2. The school system on the coast is facing a systematic crisis of children dropping out of the school system at periodical intervals. Children disappear from the schools for short intervals at the beginning mostly at the high school and by the time they reach tenth standard they stop their education completely. Some of the students stop coming to the school even before that. There are many factors that contribute to unrelenting drop- out rates among children from coastal communities.

a) Most of the families in the coastal area have more than one family living in one household and space for individual family members is quite less compared to low income families in the mainstream society. Such a situation leads to a lack of study facilities for children. The nature of the community demands community spaces where children can go and study. It also needs financial assistance to create enough infrastructure including study spaces (equal to study room programme) in the coastal community neighbourhood.

b) From our conversations with stakeholders, it is apparent that remedial classes for children from the coastal regions are very much required especially after the loss from pandemic days. It can be organised at

the schools or at the community level, especially with the support of civil social organizations on the coast.

c) The provision of counselling, it is worth remembering once more, is absolutely necessary for the mental well-being of coastal children. The stress of dealing with uncertainties also affects school performance and so counselling must be accepted as an aspect of schooling in vulnerable coastal communities, and not just as an add-on service.

d) Teachers and non-teaching staff in coastal schools need special orientation to assume a respectful and democratic attitude towards their pupils and their families. They must also be issued strict guidelines about behaving empathetically and respectfully towards their pupils. It is also desirable to increase community participation in school activities by ensuring that a certain minimum level of teaching and extra-curricular activities are handled by people from the coast or those familiar with and unprejudiced about life on the coast. Extra-curricular activities, especially play, must be granted greater importance than in mainland schools as they offer the possibility of relaxation and unwinding, helping children cope with uncertainties. Children from relief camps especially should be kept engaged through play, singing, story-telling, and other such relaxing activities.

e) Many among those we interviewed, both members of the community and others, remarked that the general atmosphere of uncertainty and fear were making children vulnerable to drug and alcohol abuse.

While precautions against such dangers are surely needed everywhere, the unsettled nature of life in the coastal areas in general and among the displaced people particularly is such that the latter may indeed be more vulnerable to them. Efforts at the school level should aim at bringing together children, respecting child rights and children's voice, listening carefully to teenagers and aiding their aspirations – it should minimise police involvement, and when necessary, it should be with full respect for child rights and the rights of the community.

f) We wish to emphasize that effective career counselling and placement advice, developed through the involvement of private sector companies in the mainland (through their corporate social responsibility machinery and otherwise) and youth organizations like the Coastal Students Forum may be a good start in the work of fostering youngsters among the displaced and affected people, through instilling hope and a vision of a liveable future. Vocational training centres and industrial training may be offered to interested students, but the better intervention may be one that links supply and demand so that trained students are placed regularly and dependably in jobs. There are some interesting instances of such experiments on the coast itself. Especially when many young people from coastal communities are seeking to work abroad.

g) Our interaction with community members and others also alerted us to the anxieties displaced people feel about the sexual safety of their

children. In temporary shelters, children mix with strangers, and are often more dependent more than usual on unfamiliar people. Their dependence on adults in and outside their families also grows. This makes children more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and assault. The situation is made much worse by the general silence on sexuality and the body at home and school. Children in displaced communities are in urgent need of counselling on sexual safety. They need safe spaces and safe people to confide in and report any unpleasant experience. Schools and community spaces must rise to offering them such spaces, without making things worse through judgmental and accusing attitudes. Coastal hospitals must be equipped and trained to deal with such issues as well. Teenagers must receive information about sexual violence and legal remedies as part of the school curriculum.

h) Displacement seriously affects family life. Privacy becomes a distant dream and the sexual life of couples is badly affected, as was evident in the relief camp-life in Thiruvananthapuram. This has an even-more destabilizing effect on children as alcoholism and family quarrels become even more frequent and children find it harder to find safe spaces (when neighbours, not just families, change). The Department of Women and Children should throw open the short-stay homes it runs for victims of violence in camps or start new homes in or close to coastal wards. Alcoholism should be tackled as a public health issue without resorting to police violence or elite prejudice against fishers.

V. The Potential of Local Governments in Disaster Management on the Coast

Above, we have argued that the local governments can serve much better during natural calamities on the coast, compared with the Revenue Department. In this section we elaborate on this claim and set down the reasons for such a claim. It is true that local governments played a decisive role in mitigating the impacts of the 2018 floods and the pandemic afterwards, but there are more reasons that local government in coastal areas need to be strengthened considerably to help the community face natural calamities and overcome them.

a) As mentioned earlier, local governments are most proximate to the community in coastal wards. It must be remembered that local government means not just the elected community but also women's self-help groups, the Kudumbashree. We do not claim that the present structure of local government on the coast is flawless or even adequate to the task of empowering coastal communities to deal with natural disasters. However, it provides a much more democratic framework to work with regarding community revival after natural catastrophes, compared with, say the Department of Revenue.

b) Local governments on the coast may be strengthened in this task for example, through appointing Community Promoters at the coastal villages whose working stations would be the grama panchayat. One of the biggest hurdles the community is facing at the coastal area is the lack of information and updating about support mechanisms available to them.

Low educational achievements, inadequate social networks, lack of adequate economic resources, and lack of access to institutions are still huge hurdles in their path.

c) The local governments are much better equipped socially, even though not economically, to handle the task of running of temporary shelters for the displaced, compared with the Revenue Department. Indeed, long-term effort to amend the law to entrust local governments with this responsibility is unavoidable. Local governments already work with the community at the ground level and people's familiarity with their working and the people associated with them makes them more suitable to handle the challenge of disaster management on the coast, compared with officials who are, more often than not, outsiders. However, state-level guidelines, broad frameworks that can be adapted to unique local contexts, on running the shelters will be necessary. All line and auxiliary departments should be told to follow the directions of the local government and to extend help within the mandated limit sought by it.

d) Local governments should be equipped to mobilise and interact with residential associations at the coastal villages to maintain an organic link between the intuitions and people. This will allow the local government to be involved in organising volunteers and voluntary organisations and to organise training and awareness programmes among communities at the coastal areas. This is very important in the context of growing resistance from members of the community to follow the government's instruction

to evacuate to a secure location in the event of a disaster[17]. Community mobilisation and local government attuned to the needs of coastal communities give people confidence to leave their homes behind to a secure location. In case of people refusing to leave, this liaison between LSG and community could be put in use to convince people to leave for areas of danger.

e) One of the reasons why the people in some coastal villages of Thiruvananthapuram refused to follow government instructions during the pandemic is the local government's poor performance in matters related to compensation and rehabilitation of the community members affected by disasters. It is very important for any state to make sure that the people who have suffered get back into their normal life, and to and help them to rebuild their community, and to regain the ability to thrive after facing a major crisis. Across the coastal area delay in compensation and rehabilitation is often a contested ground between government officials and community members. Following measures can be initiated to ensure building of trust between institutions of state and people in the community. A much better framework of cooperation and mutual balance between the elected panchayat committee, the Matsya Bhavan

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[17] During the Covid lockdown times, people in the Poonthura coastal area refused to follow the evacuation protocol on the ground. According to them, they have resisted because once the state evacuated people to some other place from the coastal zone, State and State institutions wouldn't take responsibility for their lives in the camp, and that is their experience of the state interventions. https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/residents-kerala-s-poonthura-protest-restrictions-govt-address-issues-128369 , accessed 13 June 2023.

officials, civil society leaders, and the officials of the Revenue Department has to be achieved.

f) Compensation payments must be re-routed through the local government, fairly assessed, expedited, and subject to civil society monitoring. Indeed, there is the need to create a civil society of fish workers, organized in groups that will function as a body to which fishery officials and elected panchayat members are equally answerable. A great hurdle in the way of any such effort is the rampant nepotism practiced by political parties, who corner all these spaces for their supporters, even when they are not fishers at all. The development-civil society of fishers, therefore, must be designed in a way that is not just representative of the community, but also is capable of thwarting nepotism.

g) Evaluation of the amount and nature of destruction caused by disasters should be carried out by the local government, and the methods of evaluation should be announced in advance, kept open to questions and revision in transparent ways. . In other words, the process of evaluation should be such that it gives the community a space to articulate the loss they suffered and make a claim. Unlike revenue officials making arbitrary evaluations and superimposing their views on the matter, this method helps the government and the community to exchange views and come to a mutually acceptable decision). Local governments possess far greater capacity to organise neighbourhood groups meetings regarding loss suffered by the community members and initiate a free and open discussion on the matter. It allows for a better and more realistic

assessment of the volume of work to be undertaken as part of the rehabilitation after the disaster. This also helps social auditing of the process of evaluation by the members of the community). Local governments are also far better equipped to liaison with other relevant departments and bodies to inspect individual houses and make sure that they are secure before allowing the displaced people to return to their homes. Such evaluations should be carried out by technically competent officials accompanied by elected representatives and representatives of the community. The inspections also should suggest immediate measures to be taken to ensure the safe return of the people if houses are inhabitable. The local governments should have resources and power at their disposal to request the restoration of power and water supply at the earliest so that the community can resume normal life.

h) Local governments with coastal wards must have a new Standing Committee that addresses the development needs of coastal wards including the issues of displacement and slower processes of habitat destruction on the coast. This would allow these governments to have separate plans for allocation of funds exclusively for the needs of the coastal wards. It also allows the plan discussions, policy and programmes for the coastal wards including preparing for disasters and displacement. There are demands of forming separate LSGs for the coastal area since the situation in the coastal area is different and most often the demand of coastal areas gets side-lined in general discussions. The formation of a separate panchayat for the coastal areas would help to formulate plans to

address the problems posed by the disaster in the region. As stated above, forming a Standing Committee can be initiated as an interim mechanism.

i) Throughout our interviewing among the displaced people, elected members, KS representatives and others in the Thiruvananthapuram coast, we encountered a great deal of resistance and reluctance to speak. The protests against the Adani Ports had created an atmosphere of fear and distrust, and also of disappointment among the people including elected members. The latter seemed to experience a sense of helplessness in the face of the state government's open support of big capital against the local people as they struggled to balance their commitments as political party members and their sense of belonging, as members of the community under threat. There was an implicit understanding that local government, especially in urban and peri-urban areas, is on its way to becoming increasingly irrelevant to struggles for local people's wellbeing and rights. This is perhaps not limited to Thiruvananthapuram alone; it will be increasingly be the case in other sites as well in rapidly-urbanising Kerala. We therefore call for a deeper and more widespread discussion on strengthening the bargaining power of fisher communities in the wards of urban bodies. This could include special status for these wards in the elected council, special sabhas, a separate standing committee, and so on. We wish to point out that reducing local governments to irrelevance in the interest of attracting big capital to the coast will in the future extract an impossibly high toll from Kerala's democracy and undermine the very legitimacy of the government in the eyes of the coastal people.

VI. Livelihood

Coastal erosion and depletion of marine products have affected seriously the livelihood of the people. The increasing volatility of the sea makes the situation worse for the communities who are dependent on the sea for their livelihood. The problems already existing in the coastal areas have been neglected by the authorities so far. This has made the community vulnerable to poverty and widened the spectrum of social and economic disparities in the region compared to the mainstream society. Besides marine products, the community depended on livestock and trade in the coastal area for their sustenance. The erosion of the coast deprived the community, especially women, such livelihood options. Frequent and more turbulent climate causing damages to the fishing equipment limits the resilience of coastal communities. Continuous and conscious efforts from the State are necessary to ensure that the present living situation is not deteriorating further.

All this is deeply experienced on the Thiruvananthapuram coast, as confirmed by our interviews and the available research on this area.

1. There is a need to prevent the loss of fishing equipment during adverse weather on the coast. Right now, such losses are crippling. The solution needs to be sought out in ways that build on the accumulated knowledge and experience of fishers.

2. Lack of other employment opportunities at the coastal area other than fishing is an important issue to be addressed as a priority. Diversifying the local economy and encouraging and promoting seafood based products helps the community to find sustainable livelihood options other than fishing

itself. The already-active programmes like Theeramaithri seemed, at least on the Thiruvananthapuram coast, seem to be thwarted mainly by nepotism, according to many displaced people. Theeramaithri and other schemes should develop products, training, financial support, and services that address the needs of the displaced people. From both our interviews as well as available research, it appears that on the Thiruvananthapuram coast only a lesser share of the vast resources spent on the welfare of fishers actually reach affected people. This needs to be immediately investigated and remedied.

3. As mentioned earlier, career counselling and placement services should be offered with the support of private sector companies as well, for young educated persons aspiring to go abroad. Again, as mentioned before, educated people from coastal communities should be offered employment in the fortified or new facilities – schools, hospitals, counselling centres etc. – that may have to be opened in the affected or vulnerable wards.

4. Women fish vendors in the camps for the displaced face the most difficult situation. Their resources are severely curtailed, and the changes in fish marketing after the pandemic have affected their access to fish and sales severely. Indebtedness is rampant on the coast, and all welfare resources women receive, including credit, gets sucked into the repayment of debt. Serious effort has to be made to break the vicious cycle of debt that women fish vendors find themselves trapped in. Again, care must be taken to ensure that welfare resources reach the most deprived sections of coastal communities. The deep insecurity induced by relief-camp life affects young women – it affects their education and freedoms, and worse, it may even lead

to early marriage of young girls as families struggle to keep their daughters safe. The employment of women should become the priority of KS in the coastal areas; micro credit is often a double-edged sword there, with men putting pressure on their wives to obtain loans. Also, KS should set aside the rhetoric of 'empowerment' in the coast as women already hold considerable economic agency within the family – the aim should be to consider, in consultation with coastal women, what may be necessary to bolster the control over finances that they now enjoy in their families.. They should now be fortified with work that yields better incomes and that which does not corrode their heath. Animal husbandry was one of the sources of income of women at the coastal area and this has been completely destroyed. It is necessary to establish several alternate lines of gainful employment for women in the coastal area.

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