

A photograph showing three people, two men and one woman, leaning over a table and playing the game Jenga. They are focused on the wooden blocks stacked in the center. The woman on the left is wearing a pink top and a blue patterned sari. The man in the middle is wearing a red shirt and glasses. The man on the right is wearing a patterned shirt. A box of Jenga is visible on the table to the left.

Fisherfolk playing jenga to understand stability in diversity.
© B. Ravichandran.

One healthy ocean for fishes and fisherfolk of Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu

A two-day workshop was conducted to understand and discuss the needs of fishes and fisherfolk on 12-13 July 2023 at Coastal Peace Development Office, Nagercoil, Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu. The workshop was organised as part of the project titled, “Elasmobranch by catch study in Tamil Nadu, India” by Zoo Outreach Organisation in partnership with South Asian Fishermen Fraternity (with Father Churchill, Tech Camp-Kochi Alumnus), with support from the US Consulate General through their TechCamp initiative facilitated by Centre for Public Policy Research, Kochi.

Around 25 people participated in the workshop and all of them were from fishing communities with different roles including fishermen and women, boat owners, auctioneers, and social activists. This ensured that all the diverse perspectives were taken into account during the discussions. Both fisherfolk and the Zooreach team spoke about the need for healthy oceans to ensure healthy fishes, sustainable fisheries, and secure livelihoods. In this regard, the threats faced by oceans were voiced by the fisherfolk and as this happened they also realised their contributions to overfishing and the current status of depleting fish stocks.

All of these topics were tackled using games, activities, scientists talk, and audio-visual presentations. This facilitated the fisherfolk to be active, alert, and have better recall value. Knowledge sharing regarding fishing practices, challenges and species was conducted between the Zooreach team and the fisherfolk.

The workshop concluded focusing on the importance of data gathering by the fisherfolk through audio recordings and visual documentation in order to understand what is happening to our fishes and oceans. The Zooreach team also requested them to measure all the different fishes including sharks and rays and provided them with measuring tapes as this will give the team an idea of the changes in size class that indicate the status of these species. All the fisherfolk were happy to support this endeavour and a whatsapp group has been started in tamil to facilitate better conversations.

A fisherman named Arul Raj, performed two songs. The first one focused on fishing in the deep sea for sharks and the second one focused on what the fisherfolk learnt from this workshop about species biology and ecology. In summary, the fisherfolk have a good understanding of the threats faced by oceans and its marine diversity and are happy to document it and work together to ensure sustainable fishing practices to conserve biodiversity and livelihoods.

Feedback/takeaways:

1. The fisherfolk would not pollute the sea with their plastics and old nets as well as collect any plastics and ghost nets found floating in the ocean for proper disposal on land.
2. Exposure to biodiversity of the ocean
3. Filling the void of interactive sessions and the opportunity to work in collaboration.



Social activist voicing his opinion.
© B. Ravichandran

4. Long term investment of collaborative conservation action by all stake holders to make Kanyakumari District a model sustainable fishing village.

5. Decision to continue with more formal and informal interactions in order to address the above points.

Acknowledgements

The Zooreach team of Dr. Sanjay Molur, Priyanka Iyer, Usha Ravindra and B. Ravichandran of the 10CEAN program thank Father Churchill, South Asian Fishermen's Fraternity, Father Dunston, Coastal Peace Development office, Kannan and Karthik, Centre for Public Policy Research, Dr Raffi, Associate Professor, University of Kerala, Praveen Rozario, Elasmobranch researcher and local community member, Colachel, Kanyakumari District, the press who covered the event, and all the participants for their whole-hearted participation in all the workshop activities.

The Zooreach team also thanks Brindha Jayakanth, Public Engagment Specialist and Scott Hartman, Cultural Affairs Officer, from US Counsulate General for funding the project.



Banner with all partners, collaborators and funders.

Priyanka Iyer, 10Ocean Coordinator, Zoo Outreach Organisation Trust, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641006, India.



Working groups discussing role of different stakeholders.
© B. Ravichandran.



Group photo. © B. Ravichandran.