

## **GIZ and MWCC organised “Sagar Sangathi 2016” at Porbandar for Coastal Biodiversity Conservation and Awareness**

Marine diversity represents the natural wealth of the Earth and provides the basis for life, sustenance and prosperity for the present and future generations. Nature provides us with vast diversity of benefits such as food, wood, clean water, healthy soil, energy, and protection from floods, carbon storage and many more. With the increase in human population, the environmental functions are increasingly in competition with each other. A conflict is being waged between growth of production and population on one hand and the environment on the other. At Sea, more than a billion people relies on fisheries as their main or sole source of animal protein, especially in the developing countries.

Whale sharks are the world’s largest fish. Yet, they remained unknown, hidden underneath the ocean depths, to all except the fishing communities in India until about two decades ago. In Gujarat where most sightings were recorded, the fishing communities called it ‘barrel’ an indication to the tool used to hunt this species. The fish was hunted in hundreds for liver oil used in water-proofing boats and the by-product meat was exported. In 2001, the whale shark was brought under protection of Indian laws, making it the first fish to be listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. A total of 1974 whale sharks have been recorded in the Indian waters, out of which 1866 were recorded only in Gujarat incl. 1865 from Veraval (Whale shark in the Indian coast – Need for conservation, P. Pravin). Almost 95% countrywide sightings of whale sharks are from Saurashtra coast, which itself tells ecological importance of Saurashtra coast for Whale sharks. However, awareness is low, mandating a campaign to let people know its legal status, and to change perceptions about this fish in itself. There is more work required to unravel the mysteries of this unique fish – also known as the gentle giants especially in the coastal line Porbandar district.

Gujarat also has many marine reptilian species which includes four species of sea turtles, namely olive ridley, green, leatherback and hawksbill turtles. However, nesting of only olive ridley and green turtles has been documented on the Gujarat coast while the other two species are occasionally sighted by local fishermen. In 2005, a high concentration of green turtle nests about 50-100 were found in five different beach stretches lying between Porbandar and Junagadh districts where almost all were observed to be green turtle nests. Only one nest of olive ridley was recorded from the Madhavpur beach. (Kurian and Sunderraj 2005, Kurian 2008). At Porbandar, the turtle nesting intensity for the year 2000 was 1.51 nests/km; which was reduced to density of 0.88 nests/km in 2013 (Marine Turtles Along the Indian Coast, WWF Report).

Concluding above accounts, it is very clear that Saurashtra coast is very much important for the marine biodiversity especially Coral, Turtles and Whale sharks. But, because of lack of awareness and raising threats these magnificent creatures are being wiped out year by year. “Coastal Biodiversity Conservation and Awareness (CBCA)- Role of Fishermen” will definitely

raise awareness about coastal biodiversity among community members of Porbandar coast and will deliver a message of awareness and conservation.

### **Objectives**

1. Involvement of local communities in the marine conservation
2. Raising awareness about charismatic marine biodiversity among fishermen
3. To promote awareness activities about the things fishermen should do to reduce the stress on whale sharks and turtles during rescues
4. To spread awareness on importance of Whale shark and Sea Turtle as marine biodiversity flagship species
5. To educate participants on importance of corals as marine rain forests
6. To highlight unique coastal area of Porbandar
7. To motivate the participants to celebrate Whale Shark Day, Turtle Day, Coast Clean Up Day etc

On 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2016, Sagar Sangathi event was organised at Porbandar by GIZ and Mokarsagar Wetland Conservation Committee (MWCC) under GIZ's Gujarat CMPA project. Leading community members of Porbandar Kharva Samaj (Fish worker community) like Mr Sunilbhai D Gohil, Vanot & President, Porbandar Samast Kharva Samaj along with Presidents of Boat associations and community groups like Mohanbhai Bhutiya, Sanjaybhai Lodhari, Manishbhai Lodhari and Dhanjibhai Lodhari were also present.

Mr Sunilbhai D Gohil inspired Fishworkers in his key note address that we must understand that community includes entire human population along with Fishing community and the fishing of fry and fingerlings should be avoided for our future benefits only. He appreciated support of GIZ to MWCC for this event which was exclusively organised for common and poor fishworkers mainly pilana (small boat) operators. On behalf of GIZ, Technical Expert, Dr Aeshita Mukherjee Wilske was present and she provided the details of GIZ CMPA Gujarat project.

### **Expert Talks**

Dr Kamlesh Mehta, Nature Club Porbandar gave glimpse of coastal biodiversity and stressed on role of fishermen in conservation.

Ms Janki Teli, CEE provided detailed account of coastal biodiversity of Arabian ocean and Gulf of Kutch. Along with Dr Dishant, she explained the ecological and economic importance of several marine species and focused on why fishermen should consider conserving them.

Mr Amit Jagatiya, MWCC presented on sea weeds of Porbandar, its cultivation and economic importance. He also gifted the greetings cards made up of algae to the participants.

Dr Dishant Parasharya, GEER and Mr Vinod Gajjar caught participants' attention with beautiful underwater life of Gulf of Kutch.

Mr Shiyani, RFO, Marine National Park was also present throughout the program and he shared various rescue and conservation work done by Marine National park. He also provided various awareness materials for kits.

Mr Dinesh Goswami and Mr Jignesh Gohil of Prakruti Nature Club Kodinar provided detailed account of Marine Turtles and ways to conserve it. Mr Goswami also appreciated the conservation activities by fish workers across the state and also cared about economic loss they face while conserving whale sharks. They also explained the procedure of obtaining compensation for fishing nets while rescuing whale sharks.

Madhavpur Turtle hatchery works under Positra range of Marine National Park where Mr Pravin and Mr Pradip's family work for turtle conservation since last three generations. Their conservation activities were honoured by GIZ, MNP and MWCC during Sagar Sangathi 2016.

At last, Mr Dhaval Vargiya, President, MWCC thanks each and everyone involved in the making of Sagar Sangathi.





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