



Communities & Resource Governance

Strengthening inclusive
coastal governance



Justice and inclusion lie at the core of true social-ecological change

Across India's shorelines, millions of people are dependent on coastal-marine ecosystems for their daily existence, livelihoods, nutrition and identity. However, decisions on the governance of these natural resources are limited by social exclusionary practices, fragmented policies, and poor attention to conflict and competition by unequal interest groups.

These shortcomings create a cycle of exclusionary governance, which leads to resource degradation through overuse and neglect. When coastal communities are excluded from decision making arenas, it contributes to flawed management practices, declining natural resources and increasing conflict over resource use, skewed outcomes of welfare measures and overall weakened wellbeing among coastal communities. Inclusive governance lies at the heart of all social change and the well-being of a nation's people.



Photo credits: Bipin Behera

Dakshin's Communities and Resource Governance (CRG) programme focuses on enabling inclusive, informed and accountable decision-making in governance for coastal and marine social ecological systems. It centres the important role of small-scale fishing and local coastal communities in shaping decisions that affect them, while strengthening the institutions, laws and policy processes that steer resource-use across coastal-marine geographies of India.

● OUR APPROACH

Working across local, regional and national scales

We work to strengthen the laws, practices, institutions and informal systems that govern coastal and marine areas through four steps:

Policy analyses

Examine how coastal and marine governance systems function in practice, where they fall short, and how laws, policies, institutions and lived realities interact.

Democratise knowledge

Make coastal legal, policy, resource use and governance knowledge more accessible through open-access resources, multilingual materials, policy briefs, toolkits, visual materials and other formats that communities and practitioners can use.

Enable inclusive participation

Support coastal communities to participate in public consultations, regulatory processes, local governance and decision-making spaces that affect their lives, livelihoods and commons.

Encourage collaboration for efficient governance

Work with social institutions, academics, civil society groups and policy bodies to improve governance policy, practice, reform and knowledge-generation for democratising spaces on coastal-marine resource use and governance.

● WHAT WE DO

Research, outreach and intervention



- **Socio-legal studies**

We examine how coastal and marine governance systems function in practice, with attention to gaps in access, implementation, participation and accountability. This work combines legal analysis, community knowledge and field-based research to inform equitable and effective governance.

- **Governance education and outreach**

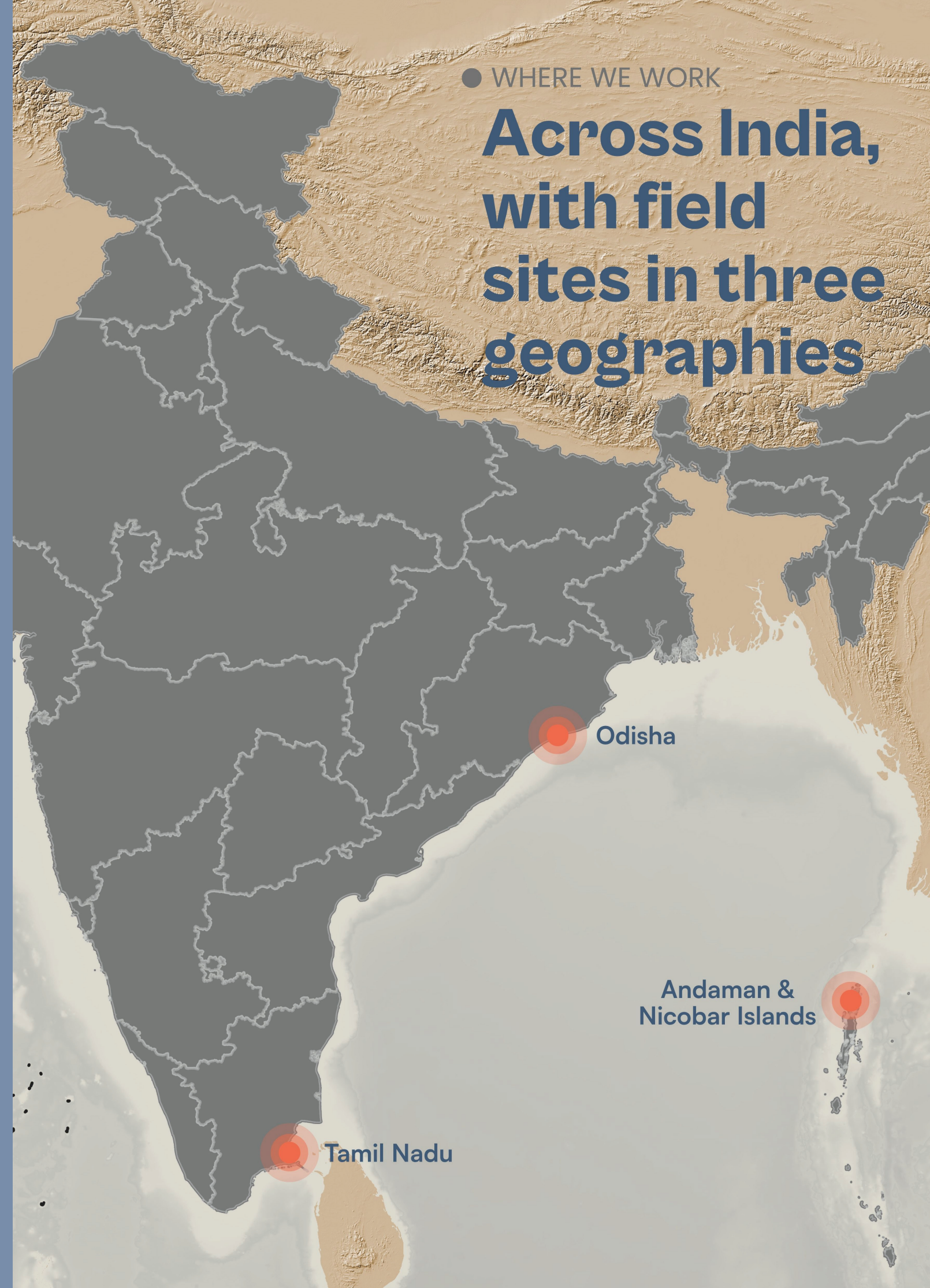
We make knowledge on coastal governance accessible and usable for generic and targeted application. This includes translating research and expert analyses into policy briefs, toolkits, visual materials and open-access legal resources that support engagement across communities, civil society, researchers, practitioners and policymakers. We also create these resources in multilingual formats so coastal governance knowledge can reach and be used by wider audiences.

- **Fostering inclusive governance practice**

We support emerging leaders, knowledge holders, and representatives of small-scale fishing and local coastal communities with knowledge, skills, capacity and real-world experience in a range of governance practices. We equip these critical actors with a strong understanding of governance systems, legal frameworks and multi-modal representation skills to enable informed and effective participation in the sustainable use and conservation of coastal and marine natural resources and the communities that depend on them. Alongside this, we work with formal governance institutions of the state on administrative coordination, grievance redressal and data systems to align with community-led governance actions.

● WHERE WE WORK

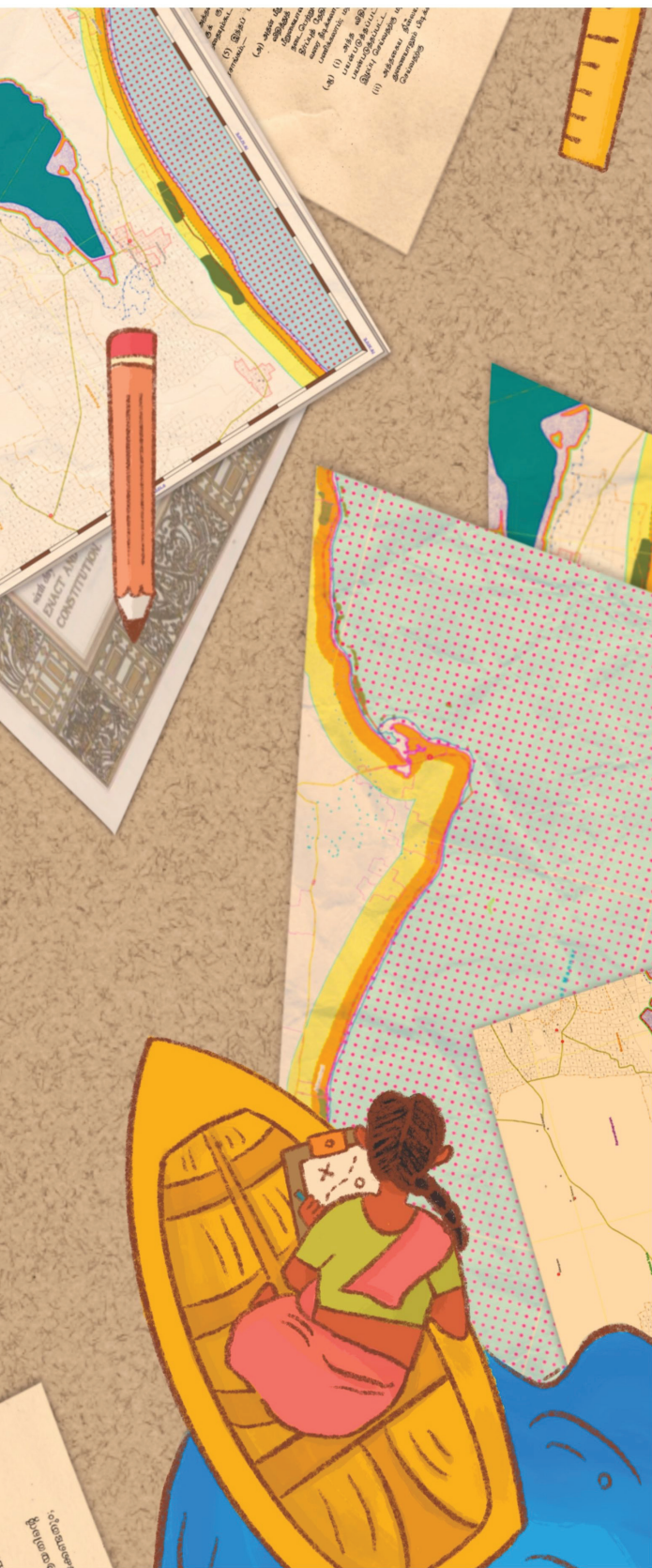
**Across India,
with field
sites in three
geographies**



Governance in action

Coastal Grassroots Fellowship (CGF) for SSF women

Across India's coasts, women play a vital role in marine fisheries, yet their work remains largely unrecognised and they are excluded from coastal governance and decision-making. The Coastal Grassroots Fellowship was conceptualised and launched by the CRG programme in 2021 in response to a growing concern over the absence of women in spaces of leadership for marine small-scale fisher communities. The fellowship is envisioned as a structured programme to build leadership, representation skills and experiences of real-time engagement by women from SSF communities in local governance processes. Fellows participate in consultations, build governance knowledge and develop practical skills that support community-level initiatives such as mapping, producing participatory photographic narratives, documentation of distress migration, conservation of coastal commons and facilitating access to entitlements. They also represent community concerns in diverse decision-making spaces.



Artwork credits: Shivani Ganesh Shenoy

Conservation of coastal-marine commons

Coastal-marine commons underpin livelihoods, food systems and economies, yet they remain poorly documented, contested and often shaped by unclear or weakly recognised tenure rights. Dakshin conducts action research, builds capacities through on-ground training, generates knowledge, and develops public engagement resources on the coastal-marine commons of India and the associated local knowledge and governance systems. We combine legal analyses, community knowledge and counter mapping strategies to build collective action towards coastal-marine commons conservation and governance.

Incubate ocean solutions to address emerging marine degradation sources

Emerging blue economies across the globalised world, when unplanned or if exclusionary in design, pose a serious concern to sustainable blue growth for maritime nations and its people's wellbeing. Priority challenges are marine plastics and solid waste management, distress migration, coastal erosion, land fragmentation and degradation, and climate induced heat stress. These and other cross-cutting challenges are transboundary in nature and impact diverse coastal communities of the Indian Ocean. Solutions for these problems involve building the right policy design, governance capabilities and distributed expertise and responsibilities. Our efforts on governance coalesce around these thematic areas.



Artwork credits: Pooja Sreenivasan and Current Conservation

Strategic climate communication and local action

Along India's coasts, rising temperatures, extreme events and shifts in marine ecosystems affect livelihoods, health and wellbeing in ways that rarely surface in mainstream climate discourse. Storytelling and strategic communication are critical for better climate governance. Our focus on governance through the CRG programme seeks to shift India's agrarian-dominated climate narrative by bringing greater visibility to the experiences of coastal and marine communities and ecosystems. We do this by working at grassroots governance spaces and specialised government agencies to assess and strengthen their capacities to understand, articulate and respond to climate impacts in coastal India. It includes assessments of formal climate action plans and real-time climate governance practice, as well as climate communication needs among grassroots catalysts and change agents.

We work with community catalysts and leaders to build and share skills and capacities on climate understanding and action. Our strategic climate communications ensures a) critical ocean and climate capacities are built across translocal policy influencers and b) that priorities and knowledge of vulnerable communities inform adaptation options across geographies in coastal India. This dual intervention is key to optimise available financial and human resources for climate action.



Artwork credits: Ipsa Jain and Current Conservation

Primary institutional donors



Key thematic donors

- Accenture Solutions Private Limited
- Dasra UK
- International Sustainable Energy Foundation, USA
- Swiss Philanthropy Foundation

The background of the entire page is a light blue color. It is covered with a dense, repeating pattern of white line drawings of various marine organisms, including starfish, seashells, coral, and small fish. A prominent yellow line winds through the pattern, connecting several of the organisms. On the right side of the page, there is a large, stylized red silhouette of a person standing with one hand on their hip and the other arm reaching upwards towards a starfish. The person's arm is extended, and their hand is positioned near the yellow line that connects to the starfish they are reaching for.

Partner with Dakshin

Dakshin Foundation seeks to work with governments, research institutions, civil society organisations, philanthropic partners, practitioners and community organisations that share a commitment to strengthening legal and policy access, coastal commons governance, and inclusive decision-making across India's coastal and marine systems.

To explore opportunities for collaboration, write to info@dakshin.org

Artwork credits: Smitha Shivaswamy and Current Conservation