dakshin

Sustainable Coastal Livelihoods

For an inclusive, sustainable and resilient blue economy



Artwork credits: Ujan Dutta

THE CHALLENGE

A stronger blue economy starts with local communities

Coastal and fishing communities in India face deep social and economic exclusion, even though they sustain vital food systems, local economies and marine stewardship practices. Changing weather patterns, extreme weather events and shifts in marine ecosystems are also making fishing-dependent livelihoods increasingly uncertain, with fewer safe fishing days and fluctuating catches affecting incomes, especially for small-scale fishing communities.

Livelihood security, however, depends on more than income alone. Access to rights, social protection, health support, information, skills and opportunities to participate in decisions over the management of marine resources help reduce this vulnerability.

Creating stronger coastal economies also requires an environment where local entrepreneurship can thrive. This means understanding employment realities and enterprise potential, while addressing the systemic barriers that limit skills, value addition, market access, institutional support and locally relevant opportunities.

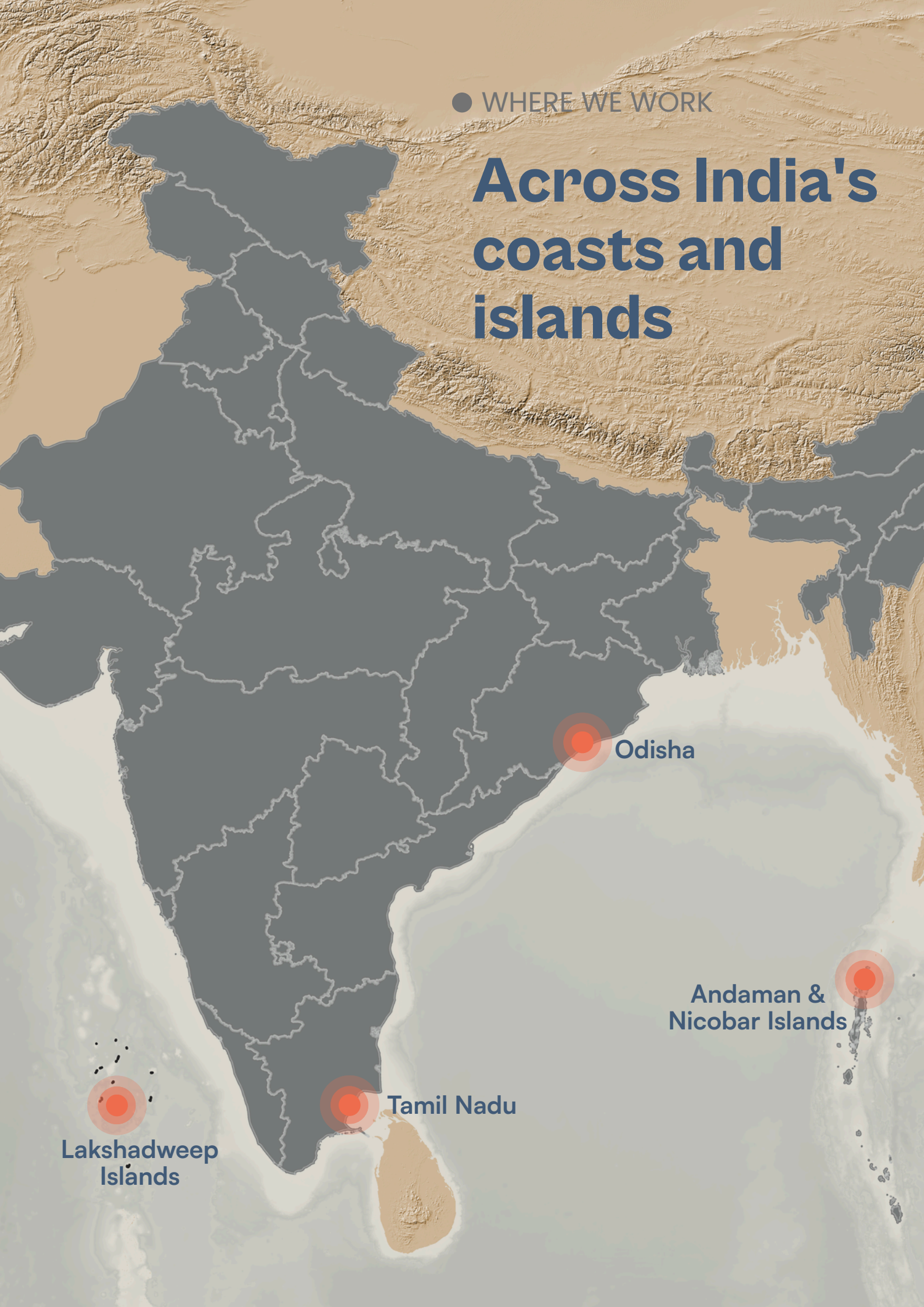


In island economies such as the Andaman Islands, geographical isolation and socio-political factors can further limit employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, particularly for youth and women.

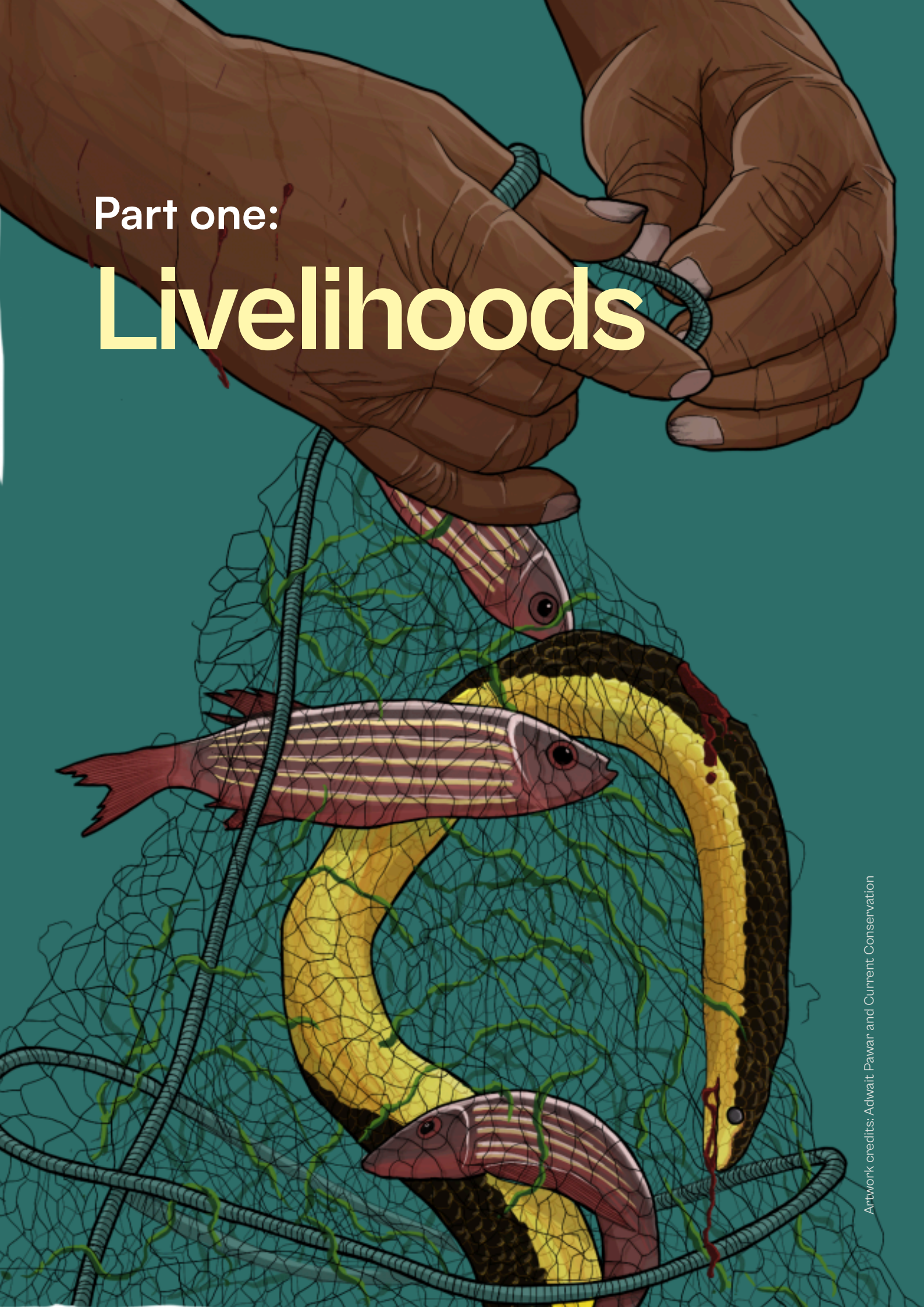
Dakshin's work focuses on strengthening dignified and ecologically grounded livelihood pathways that improve income, reduce risk, expand access to support and build long-term resilience. We also work to create enabling environments for entrepreneurship by identifying locally relevant economic opportunities and addressing the systemic barriers that limit enterprise and job creation. Across both, we build on existing community knowledge, skills and systems, while centring community aspirations and priorities.

WHERE WE WORK

Across India's coasts and islands



Part one:
Livelihoods



Artwork credits: Adwait Pawar and Current Conservation

Building resilient livelihoods through an integrated approach

Improve access to rights, welfare and support

Strengthen access to rights, welfare schemes and social protection through simple, accessible information on schemes and subsidies. Additionally, we propose village resource centres that provide practical support with applications, enrolment, documentation, banking, health benefits and other entitlements. This helps communities access existing support systems and better manage crises, seasonality, injury and loss.

Strengthen existing livelihoods and women-led fisheries enterprises

Build on sectors where communities already hold knowledge and skills by strengthening existing value chains, producer group formations, processing practices, value addition, and market access and linkages. This helps producers, particularly women, reduce waste, improve returns and retain more value.

Develop accessible, ecosystem-linked livelihood models

Develop low-capital, low-tech and low-footprint livelihood models, including aquaculture and blue carbon-linked pathways, that are accessible to economically marginalised communities, suited to local ecological and social contexts, and create opportunities to diversify income.

Build skills for coastal and blue economy pathways

Support coastal youth to build skills in documentation, mapping, monitoring, research and communication. These skills create livelihood pathways in research, conservation and allied coastal and blue economy sectors, while strengthening community participation in marine resource governance.

Link livelihoods with ecosystem restoration

Develop livelihood models that support ecosystem restoration and conservation while ensuring community participation, equitable benefit sharing and continued tenure and access to coastal resources.



Artwork credits: Apna Kuruvilla



Photo credits: Athira Prakash

KEY INITIATIVES

From fish to seagrass

Project Sukkhua: Supporting small-scale fisherwomen's dried fish enterprises

Building on several years of research into the dried fish value chain, Dakshin supports women dried fish producers from small-scale fishing communities to gain better economic returns. Interventions include strengthening women's producer groups, co-designing hygienic and climate-friendly drying and storage solutions, reducing wastage and improving price realisation to strengthen livelihood security. The initiative works to shorten value chains so producers can retain more value, while strengthening the continued flow of affordable and nutritious dried fish to inland and marginalised communities.



Artwork credits: Apna Kuruvilla

Value from fish waste

Dakshin supports women-led enterprises and grassroots innovation to create value from fish processing waste. We are piloting a women-led Fish Amino Acid enterprise that converts fish waste into natural organic fertiliser using low-cost local materials, while also developing a fish hydrolysate model for aquaculture feed. Together, these circular economy models create supplementary income opportunities for fisherwomen, reduce waste in fish markets and support more sustainable food production.



Artwork credits: Apna Kuruvilla



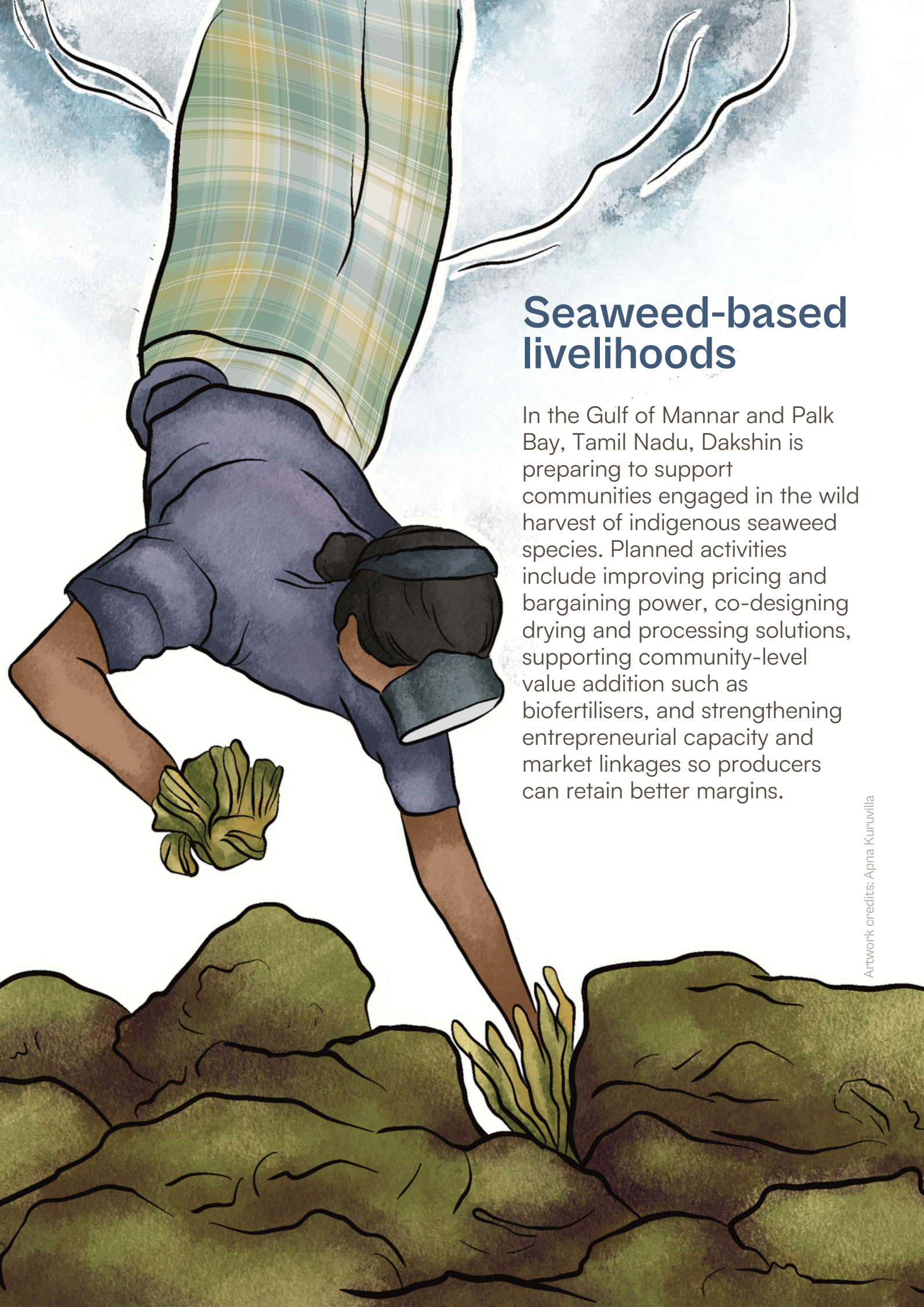
Artwork credits: Apna Kuruvilla

The Whole Fish Project

In Lakshadweep, Dakshin is developing a decentralised tuna processing model that builds on the islands' pole-and-line tuna fishery to improve local returns through value addition and better use of by-products. The model combines hygienic masmin (a traditional smoked and dried tuna preparation) production, small-scale canning and the conversion of fish waste into products such as fish silage and poultry feed. It aims to create local jobs, particularly for women and youth, reduce post-harvest losses and retain more value within island communities.

Ocean Stewardship Initiative

Dakshin identifies and trains coastal youth to combine traditional ecological knowledge with science-based monitoring, data collection and research methods. Ocean Stewards build skills in biological and socio-economic data collection, species identification, documentation, communication and participatory research. These skills create livelihood pathways in research, conservation and allied sectors, while strengthening the ability of communities to generate evidence and participate in marine resource governance.



Seaweed-based livelihoods

In the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay, Tamil Nadu, Dakshin is preparing to support communities engaged in the wild harvest of indigenous seaweed species. Planned activities include improving pricing and bargaining power, co-designing drying and processing solutions, supporting community-level value addition such as biofertilisers, and strengthening entrepreneurial capacity and market linkages so producers can retain better margins.

Artwork credits: Apna Kuruvilla



Photo credits: Meghana Teerthala

Low-footprint aquaculture

Dakshin is exploring affordable, low-impact aquaculture interventions that can create additional income opportunities for economically marginalised coastal communities. One such intervention is mud crab fattening, where crabs are raised in a small, controlled system that treats and reuses water, reduces disease risk and improves survival. Short production cycles and relatively low space requirements can make this a practical option for small-scale coastal entrepreneurs with the right training, social and market support.

Seagrass restoration and blue carbon livelihoods

Dakshin is developing community-led models that link seagrass restoration with livelihood opportunities. We will work with community members to initiate the restoration of seagrass using low-cost methods, with the aim of creating financial returns for communities from their restoration efforts.

Over time, healthier seagrass meadows can support fisheries productivity, biodiversity and climate resilience, and provide ecosystem services such as shoreline stabilisation, storm protection and carbon sequestration.



Artwork credits: Apna Kuruvilla

Part two:
Entrepreneurship



Photo credits: Rama Aadhithan

WHAT WE DO

From opportunity to enterprise

Understand employment and enterprise landscapes

Assess local employment patterns, skills, sectoral trends and enterprise potential to understand the opportunities and barriers that shape entrepreneurship in coastal and island economies.

Identify locally relevant opportunities

Identify sectors and enterprise opportunities that respond to local economic needs and build on the ecological, cultural and economic realities of a geography.

Design pathways for enterprise development

Co-design the skills, infrastructure, market linkages and institutional support that local entrepreneurs need to develop viable enterprises.

Pilot and support promising enterprises

Identify sectors and enterprise opportunities that respond to local economic needs and build on the ecological, cultural and economic realities of a geography.

Strengthen entrepreneurial ecosystems

Work across government, civil society, the private sector and community institutions to improve coordination, address systemic barriers and create an enabling environment for local enterprises and employment.



Photo credits: Druva Kumar

KEY INITIATIVE

Building an entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands

The Andaman & Nicobar Islands face high unemployment, particularly among young people and women. Geographical isolation limits opportunities for locally rooted enterprises.

Dakshin is developing a place-based approach to entrepreneurship that began with understanding the islands' employment and enterprise landscape, potential and barriers. We used this evidence to identify locally viable sectors and opportunities, and co-design the infrastructure and institutional support needed to develop viable enterprises. Promising ventures from this enterprise landscape then move into pilots and receive support to grow through partnerships with government, civil society, businesses and local communities. The aim is to strengthen an entrepreneurial ecosystem that creates jobs, retains more value locally and reflects the ecological, cultural and economic realities of the islands.

We plan to build out this ecosystem and extend this to the Middle and North Andaman Islands in the next phase.



Photo credits: Himshi Singh



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Primary institutional donors

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Key thematic donors

- Accenture Solutions Private Limited
- Swiss Philanthropy Foundation
- Dasra USA
- Blue Ventures Transform Bottom Trawling
- Environmental Defense Fund



Partner with Dakshin

Dakshin Foundation seeks to work with governments, research institutions, civil society organisations, philanthropic partners and practitioners who share a commitment to strengthening livelihood security, enabling local entrepreneurship and building economies rooted in local ecological and social realities.

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

Artwork credits: Smitha Shivaswamy and Current Conservation

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