The Right to Survive - Turtle Conservation and Fisheries Livelihoods

Each year, the eastern coast of India witnesses a truly spectacular occurrence of nature, the arrival en masse of thousands of thousands of Olive Ridley turtle in the coastal region of the state of Orissa. Last year, for instance, an estimated 240,000 adult Olive Ridleys congregated at Rushikulya on the Orissa coast to breed. Coincidentally, the breeding season also happens to be the park fishing season in Orissa, one of the poorest state of India. Thousands of fishing families rely on this season to fish, and around 70,000 fishworkers are entirely dependent on Orissa' coastal fisheries for their livelihoods.

Moves to protect the Olive Ridleys and their breeding and nesting grounds have led to mounting conflicts involving fishing communities, government department and conservationists, principally because these turtles' breeding habitats in the river mouths also happen to be the richest fishing grounds of Orissa. Interactions between turtle congregations and bottom-trawl and gillnet fishing have been report since 1974.

Over the last two decades, the issue has attracted considerable attention, with many turtles being trapped in fishing nets as incidental catch, and subsequently, dying. Today there are several restrictions that define the boundaries of fishing for the traditional fisherfolk, which has serious implications for their source of livelihood.

As the pressure to conserve ecosystems and their resources rises steadily all over the world, so have conflicts between conservation imperative and the livelihood interests of the communities that interact with these ecosystems. The film, The Right to Survive: Turtle Conservation and Fisheries Livelihood, discusses these issues. By taking an intense look at the concerns revolving around turtle conservation and the protection of the livelihood of traditional fishing communities, its offers some insights into the dilemmas facing the various stakeholders, and attempts to provide a solution for tomorrow.