This case study was undertaken as a part of the comparative global research project on civil society and governance, co-ordinated by the IDS at the Sussex University and funded by the Ford Foundation. In India, PRIA, the People's Resource Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, research and education, conducted a study on the fish farmers involved in the Chilika Bachao Andolan (Save the Chilika Movement) in Orissa. The study focused on the key governance problems, the issues and the processes that have contributed to the formation of the movement, and the role of civil society in influencing the policy; and the long-term impact of the movement on governance, as far as policy decisions are concerned.

Methodology

The movement or governance, as far as policy decisions are concerned, were influenced by the people's motives, the people's role in influencing the policy; and the long-term impact of the movement on governance, as far as policy decisions are concerned.

Chilika Bachao Andolan

Chilika Bachao Andolan (Save the Chilika Movement) was a movement by the people, mostly fishermen, who posed a successful resistance in the early 90's to the Integrated Shrimp Farm Project (ISFP) - a joint venture agreed upon by the Tata Iron and Steel Company and Government of India. The project was opposed by the local communities living around the Chilika Lake, resulting in a series of protests by the fish farmers. These protests were supported by the civil society organizations, who pushed for the successful resistance of the movement.

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Contextualising the Resistance

Chilika, located in the Puri, Khurda and Ganjam districts of Orissa, is the largest brackish water lake in India. It is home to large varieties of fish and plants that used to thrive in the lake. The lake is an important breeding ground for birds and is also a rich source of information on the lake, its ecosystem and the complexities of its socio-economic mosaic.

Traditional Fishing Grounds

On the basis of the type of fishing ground, the fishing practices differ for the fishermen belonging to different caste groups:

- **Khati**: Fishing is done mostly with the help of bamboo traps set in shallow areas and are operated between March and September.
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The fishing practices differ for the fishermen belonging to different caste groups:

- **Keuta**: Fishing is done with nets.
- **Kandara**: Fishing is done with bamboo traps called dhaudi and tata for catching crabs and prawns.
- **Tiar**: People use bamboo traps called baja.
- **Karatias**: People use both traps and nets for fishing.
- **Nolias**: Fishing is done during March and September.

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and a large number of refugees from East Bengal who have taken to fishing as their means of livelihood though they do not possess any legal right to fish in the lake.

In the past the castes were required to follow their respective fishing practices and any violation of the rule was considered as a serious social offence. The kandaras and Tiarsthus could use only bamboo traps and fishing nets while the remaining castes used only bamboo traps for the catch fish. The fishermen had to go to their prescribed fishing grounds even if it was at a distance from the village.

Fishing Rights of the People

The traditional fishing communities claim their fishing rights to the British period. When Chilika fishery sources were in their initial days, the fishing was done by the local people with traditional fishing methods. The British government introduced modern fishing techniques and machinery, which led to a decrease in the number of fishermen.

Till 1988 however, there was no clear cut demarcation of fishing sources, type of net to be used, and barricades to be set up to catch prawn. This resulted in considerable difficulty for the primary societies to operate. There was a dispute in 1986 between two primary societies relating to the fixing of barricades for catching prawn. It was a dispute between fishermen inhabiting the same area. The dispute was never resolved and it continued for many years. The 1988 policy demarcated the fishery sources; it also increased the annual lease of fisheries to three years.

In 1991 the Government of Orissa issued an order which divided the fisheries in Chilika into two categories—capture and culture, without however, adequately defining the meaning of the terms. Capture rights and culture rights were given to the primary societies. This resulted in a dispute between fishermen and non-fishermen. The fishermen feared that their traditional rights were being curtailed by leasing out culture sources to non-fishermen.

Despite the time and again reiteration by the government that the policies were meant to safeguard the traditional rights of the fishermen, the policies did not yield the desired effect for various reasons. The very purpose of a dual co-operative structure designed to protect the traditional rights was thus vitiated.

Initially the culturing of prawn began in the peripheral landmass of Chilika. The leased out diams, uthapani, and upland jano fisheries were converted into prawn culture ponds with mud embankment. Later the lake, deeper Chilika, was also enclosed with bamboo poles and net for prawn culture.

Since 1980's the lake is witnessing widespread subletting of leased out fisheries by the Central Society and the primary societies and illegal encroachment by non-fishermen and outsiders. This culturing of Chilika is being done with the help of the Central Society and the primary societies.

Finding Rights of the People

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The Livelihood School

This widespread culturing of prawn has threatened the livelihood of traditional fishermen as well as the ecosystem of the lake. Thousands of fishermen and non-fishermen families have lost their livelihood due to conversion of traditional fishing sources to culture fisheries. Cases of litigation and prawn politics now define the lives of the people in Chilika. Besides large scale obstruction and blockade in the water channels obstructs the free flow of water, free swimming space for the fish and loss of grazing ground for the fish. The gheris also act as silt trap and accelerate the process of siltation.

It is in this socio-economic and political background that the Government of Orissa made an agreement with the business house of the Tatas for a joint semi-intensive prawn culture project called the Integrated Shrimp Farm Project (ISFP) and allowed the business house of the Tatas an advance possession of 400 hectares of land in Chilika for the ISFP.

The Integrated Shrimp Farm Project

In 1986 the then Congress government of Orissa entered into deal with the Tata Aquatic Farms Ltd. to lease 1400 hectares of land in Chilika to the business house of Tata for the prawn culture. The project envisaged the creation of an artificial lake inside Chilika by enclosing the landmass with a 13.7 kms long ring embankment. This artificial lake was to be divided into a number of ponds in which the prawns were to be cultured. The project comprised of the following units:

- Shrimp farm: 300 ha. pond area in Chilika to produce 1500 M.T of shrimp per annum.
- Processing plant: to process 1500 M.T of shrimp for export initially in a leased out plant. The entire output of the farm was to be processed and exported. The annual turnover from the farms was to be Rs. 3000 lakhs which was to be converted into foreign exchange.
- As a part of the extension service to small scale farmers and cooperatives in Chilika region, the project mentioned that about 70 million post larvae would initially be made available to them along with technical assistance. The Government of Orissa would render any infrastructural help required in this regard.
- The Project emphasised that the direct as well as indirect employment of people in the project and opening of new farms would elevate the socio-economic status of the people around the farm.

Civil Society Assertion

Though the fishing communities had been resisting the commercial use and their consequent loss of control over their resources, the IFSP Project would function at the university level and KYS would function as a forum to mobilise the youths against the project.
This was in August 1991. With the initiatives of the students and the meeting of intellectuals was convened at Bhubaneswar. Out of this meeting grew Chilika Suraksha Parishad which was assigned the task of creating awareness among the intellectuals, scientists, ecologists, and teachers about the social, economic, and environmental issues related to Chilika lake. The students also realised that the local organisations could be an effective vanguard for carrying the resistance against the project. Their grounding on the local issues and the trust local people had in them would help the local organisations carry the resistance forward more effectively. Steps were thus taken to involve the Chilika Matsyajibi Mahasangha, a mass organisation of 122 revenue villages in Chilika which works towards the protection of interests of the fishermen. Chilika Matsyajibi Mahasangha, which was fallen to the politics of rivalry between political parties, was revived to take up the cause of the fishermen vis-a-vis the Tata project. The Chilika Bachao Andolan (CBA) was formally launched in January 1992 to work as an extension of Chilika Matsyajibi Mahasangha in the areas adjacent to the project to spearhead the movement. Sri Govind Behera was nominated as the convenor of the movement. CBA was extended support by many other civil society organisations like Ganatantrik Adhikar Suraksha Sangathan, an organisation based in Bhubaneswar and working towards the protection of the democratic rights of the people, and Orissa Krushak Mahasangha (OKM) which works for the cause of the farmers. Mr. B.B. Das, the president of OKM, played an important role in working to the Ramsar Convention in which Chilika lake was declared as one of the endangered wetland which needed to be protected.

All these civil society initiatives and formations gave the local people's protest the form of a movement which raised social, economic, and environmental issues related to the project. The following are some of the prominent issues raised by the movement:

1. The land allotted to the ISFP was traditionally being used by the neighbouring 26 villages for harvesting prawn. The shallow water collected during monsoon was ideal for the natural breeding of prawn.

2. The threats of flood and waterlogging due to the construction of the embankment on the Bhubanika canal which forms the outlet of the lake into the sea.

3. The embankment would obstruct the movements of the fish and prawn from brackish water to the sea during the breeding season. This would obstruct the natural regeneration of the prawns.

4. Long-term availability of fish within the lake would be adversely affected due to the pollution caused by protein feed chemicals and pesticides.

5. The project had moved ahead without the mandatory Environment Impact Assessment.

6. The land given on lease to the ISFP was classified as reserved wetlands and community pasturage land. Hence the leasing of the lake was illegal as the lake was not classified under leaseable property.

The above immediate issues were linked by the movement with the central question on development and resource use. As the movement put it:

"The Tata project is not the central point of attack of this people's movement. The prime focus of opposition is the policy of the government towards Chilka and its people and the island project only an instance of this policy."

[From a booklet titled, Chilika: Voice of the people, published by Chilka Bachao Andolan, Kantadarshi Yuva Sangam, the year of publication is not available]