

Thira, a wave

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Participation of women and children's group during the event

How can we work with communities on environmental issues through a participatory approach? There is a traditional fishing community called *Mukkuvars* in South India, whose livelihood depends on the Oceans. Here, designer plays the role of a facilitator, working with *Mukkuvars* to design communication for behaviour change which can reduce marine pollution. Creating outcomes with the participation of people with diverse skill sets led to mutual learning, exchange of ideas and sensibilization, which was more important than the intended outcome of a neatly designed spatial experience. Collaboration can bring positive changes in society. During the deluge Kerala State faced in 2018, people witnessed the potential of local communities, who worked together to save the lives of many. Why can't similar strength and indigenous local knowledge be utilised to work for a global social cause?

Co-creation

First-hand knowledge of the *Mukkuvars* and parallel views of academicians on the issue need to be shared and



Sharing knowledge and skill while working on installations
Discussion with the decision makers



Mukkuvars, volunteers, working together on installations

discussed with the public to create awareness and to generate solutions. Building collaborations meant connecting such groups who rarely interact with each other, otherwise. *Mukkuvars* are like the sea - dynamic and unpredictable. To work with them, one has to understand and adapt according to situations. Familiarity with their language, curiosity to learn, behaving empathetic, appreciating their ideas are some important qualities required. In a socially inclusive and participatory design process, the stakeholders feel valued and empowered, developing a sense of ownership towards the environment, and thus care for it. Thus, around 20 collaborations designed and co-created a space which facilitated stakeholders - including artists, performers, decision-makers and children - to come together and express their opinions on marine pollution. A plastic-free event, elements made from local materials, using local skill of *Mukkuvars* invited around 400 people to be a part of the unique experience.