Successful climate change adaptation cases emphasis synergistic approach between state institutions and community institutions. There have been mounting studies that emphasise the emerging patterns and the projected risks of climate events and coastal hazards across coastal India. Small-scale fishing communities are the front-line victims of climate change. Local institutions and its principal actors play influential roles in the governance of marine resources at the local levels in many parts of India. However, we have limited knowledge available to understand how the local leadership influence the fishing communities to respond and to adapt to climate change. In the context of multiple stressors (including climate change) and strongly rooted local institutions, it is increasingly important to understand the roles of local leadership in facilitating climate change adaptation efforts.

Provided this background, applying the conceptual underpinnings on social capital, this paper addresses two research questions. They are i) How the local leadership of the fisheries’ institutions operate to garner the support of both their community and the state government to respond to climate change? ii) What factors drive the community leadership of the local fisheries’ institutions to successfully negotiate with the state government to facilitate climate change adaptation efforts? My paper essentially employs the data that was obtained by in-depth interviews, focus-group discussions with the local leaders of the selected small fishing villages in the south-eastern coast of Tamil Nadu, India. The small-scale fishers of the south-eastern Coast of Tamil Nadu, India are increasingly vulnerable to multiple stressors including over-fishing, coastal disasters and climate stress. They are the victims of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and three major cyclones for over the last two decades. Influential self-governing fisheries’ institutions operate the marine governance of this region for centuries, and it encompasses deep-rooted history. My paper shows that local leaders of the fisheries institutions play vital roles in increasing the social resilience of the fishers to respond multiple stressors, including climate change. Highlighting the field insights, I argue inadequate financial resources, insufficient knowledge diffusion and weak participation of the marginal fisherwomen have plagued the capacity of the local institutions to respond to climate change.