

Livelihoods of marine fishing communities along India's east coast



A SITUATION ASSESSMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Overview:

In India, over nine million people directly depend on fisheries for their livelihood of which 80 per cent are small scale fishers. Fishing is mainly carried out with traditional fishing crafts, motorized boats and small mechanized crafts

2. COVID measures:

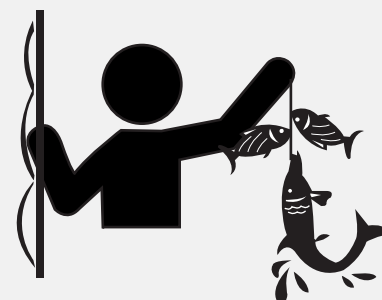
Fishers have not ventured into the sea since 20 March 2020. The annual fishing ban period is usually from April 15 till June 15 along the east coast of India. So, there is huge pressure among the fishers, fish vendors and fishing labourers as a result of the lockdown.

MSSRF Policy Brief

The industry employs over 14 million people and contributes to 1.1 per cent of the Indian GDP. Overall the east coast region accounts for 25 per cent of total Indian marine landings.

3. Impacts:

- I. Day-to-day earnings of fishers affected in all coastal districts.
- II. Small scale fishers who fishing near the shore are struggling to market their catch with new norms and short time available for sales. Rates are about 30 per cent lower now.
- III. Income of fish vendors, mainly women, has been badly affected due to the pandemic as fish is not available for sale and they are losing valuable daily income.
- IV. Migrants to Kerala and Karnataka for fishing activities are without work due to national lockdown and some households have been reduced to one meal a day.
- V. In the case of trawler fishers, those with storage facilities can preserve their catch from before March 20, for marketing later but with greater struggle and at very low prices. Those without storage facilities are severely affected and huge quantities of fish were discarded as well.
- VI. With the export market also on standby, the entire fishing sector chain and its allied sectors are adversely affected.
- VII. With supply chain disrupted, thousands of ice-plant workers and fishers involved in diesel transportation to the boats and youth are losing their daily wages.
- VIII. The lockdown has also affected maintenance activities of boats and engines potentially causing damage to high-cost assets.
- IX. In Odisha, the catch is more diverse during the post monsoon and the income from the sale ensures sustenance for the community during the ban period. The ban period is also the period of repair and maintenance of nets and boats and there will be pressure on the community as they would require loans to carry out maintenance costs to be able to resume fishing after the ban period. The ban period is also the period of repair and maintenance of nets and boats and without the spring catch and sale, there will be economic pressure on the community as they would require loans to carry out maintenance costs to be able to resume fishing after the ban period.



With COVID lockdown plus annual fishing ban, marine fishers will effectively lose nearly 90 fishing days this year.



Fishing - Not venturing to sea so no catch or less fish

Landing, loading and unloading sale affected due to physical distancing

Transport - lack of vehicles to transport to other markets

Market - bargaining by few customers leading to less income

Fishers, fish vendors and labourers livelihood and basic food at risk

Lost their livelihood completely - reports of increased domestic violence and restlessness

- X. Regions: The east coast of India covers the four maritime states Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal, and the Union Territories of Puducherry and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- XI. Types of communities affected: e.g. the different section of fishers, fish vendors, fishing labourers, workers in allied sectors etc.

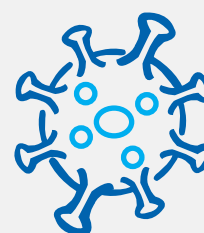
4. Fishers' voices

C N Kesavaraman, Chennai: There are about 100,000 fishers in and around Chennai. I'm from a family of traditional fishers and in my memory, this is greatest loss we have ever seen. It is six to seven days at the most that we have not ventured into sea and even then we were allowed for maintenance of our boat, net etc. However, this time, we are totally shut down. We understand it is for our life and health but if we can fish and sell along the shore with some safety norms, we can take care of our livelihood. With the fishing ban coming on April 15, we have no idea how to overcome that as well. We just got INR 1,000 from the Public Distribution System and some food supplies but how long will that actually help a family of 4-5 people. Fishing communities have not yet been approached by officials to take their thoughts. On our initiative we have set up a community kitchen for about 100 people per day. We are just looking for a way to carry out our work.

Yogambika Tamizhselvan, Nagappattinam: There are about 2,500 women who work as fish vendors, locally and outside. We are in great difficulty; from taking on the household burden, we are also taking on the burden of coronavirus as well. We are not able to go out even to ask for help, not able to get a pass, though grocers are getting passes. They are allowing vegetables and milk but not fish. If only we can go to sea, if they tell us how it can be safe. We don't have anything other than cereals to eat. There are a lot of problems at home with men looking for illicit alcohol, due to the lockdown since regular alcohol shops are shut. They are even pawning our ration cards for INR 500. Violence in the homes has increased greatly since the lockdown.

5. Nutrition Impact:

Fish has an important role to play in nutrition, food security and consumption of fish is the key to good health. It is especially crucial for women and children. Lack of fish in the diet will have considerable impact on nutrition security, particularly of importance for marginalized communities.



"We depend on the sea for our daily earnings. We can deal with bad weather, cyclone and choppy waters. But the corona virus has ruined our lives," Maheswar Mandal, a fisherman in Kendrapara, Odisha.

6. MSSRF Support

Since the lockdown, MSSRF has been taking a few efforts to support the marine fishing communities.

- Facilitating the fishers and fish vendors to receive government announcements related to COVID-19 in a timely manner
- Organizing phone-in programs and audio conferencing with experts on regular basis and address their timely queries
- Facilitating the fish farmers to harvest their fishes maintaining social distancing and facilitate them to sale the fish through whatsapp orders
- Disseminating the information through Fisher Friend Mobile COVID 19 and also its precautionary measures.

The issues faced by fishers have been documented and periodically updated to the district administration for necessary support. Online awareness programs are being conducted, awareness material displayed in all the coastal villages and 24/7 helpline facility support is provided to fishers to address issues related to the coronavirus and provide linkages with government schemes.

7. Recommendations:

1. Provide an immediate relief package for fishing communities for the lockdown period. This should not be connected to regular compensation provided for the ban season.
2. Enlarge the scope of work under MNREGS to include skilled work such as fish drying, or value addition, processing, net mending for immediate relief. This will particularly help rural women, including fisher women manage the household.
3. Fisherfolk in villages that fall under municipalities and town panchayats and not just village panchayats, should also be provided employment relief.
4. The National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) and fisheries departments of the states concerned should come out with a package on priority basis
5. Special efforts must be made to address domestic violence issues faced by fisherwomen at the household-level.



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"Suitable adjustments will have to be made to provide immediate relief to the corona affected fishing communities. This should not be connected to regular payments like fishing ban period compensation"

M S Swaminathan.