

Problems Of Fishermen In Nellore District Of Andhra Pradesh

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INTRODUCTION

An attempt has been made in this article to enquire into the problems confronted by fishermen in Nellore District of Andhra Pradesh, which have hindered the development of fishermen co-operatives in the District. In spite of several measures undertaken by both the central and the state governments to promote the lot of fishermen, these efforts, however worthy, have not perceptibly improved the situation. The fishermen in the District have not been free from some intimidating problems. These problems have an impact upon the development of the fishermen, causing them hardships of varying degrees. The development and performance of the fishermen depends on how well they group the magnitude of the problems confronted by them in their business operations, and how well they tackle them.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The present undertaking is an attempt to study in depth, the problems of fishermen co-operatives in Nellore District of Andhra Pradesh in the light of the principles of co-operation and programmes of the central and Andhra Pradesh state government. The district has a considerably long coast line and has rich potential for fishing in the sea. Hence, it was necessary to examine and analyze the problems and ways and means to better the situation in view of the economic and social significance of the fishing industry. A brief review of the existing literature on the subject in the form of empirical and evaluative studies and articles carried out hitherto in the area of fisheries sector is presented here to serve as a background and a scaffolding for the present study, to obtain an insight into it, to identify the gaps, if any, to be filled in, and to indicate the point of departure from similar studies.

The small-scale or traditional or artisanal fishermen account for 62 percent of the aggregate fish production in India, but their socio-economic conditions are still very poor (Rangarao, 1983). Fisherwomen play an important role in the economic as well as the social and domestic life of the fisherfolk. They take an active part in drying and marketing fish, net-making and collection of firewood besides attending to domestic life (Dayal, 1977). Fisherwomen display a great control over household economic transactions and also play an active economic role outside the family. The fisherwomen's status, however, depends upon the inter play of social relations as daughter, sister, daughter-in-law, wife and grand-mother, and the ideology of the community (Sridevi, 1986). Fish producers are facing certain constraints in marketing their products. These constraints are: high commission paid to commission agents due to a lack of cold storage facilities, distant market places, low sale price, high rate of interest on loans and lack of an effective organized cooperative system (Pradadeeswaran, 2003).

Inland fisheries are given a prominent place in all the three parts of the state. Developmental efforts were initiated only in the first quarter of the present century and these included surveys of water, establishment of fish farms, collection and distribution of fish seed, experimentation and demonstration of fishing methods and fish culture techniques, etc. But the progress of the work was hampered due to the absence of qualified expert staff, government delay in sanctioning the schemes and other such factors (Subbarao, 1986).

The Fishing community is one of the weakest communities. Illiteracy, poverty and lack of knowledge of the latest fishing technology have resulted in their retarded growth. This distressing situation is further strengthened by a lack of institutional support. Consequently, fishermen are easily exploited by middlemen, who act as moneylenders, traders and contractors. The community faces some problems in availing itself of the financial benefits and infrastructural facilities (Rajadurai and Rajan, 2004).

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In order to analyze the magnitude of the problems confronted by the fishermen of Nellore District, information was collected from a representative sample of fishermen co-operatives in the areas of finance, production, marketing, raw material and infrastructure facilities, etc. The methodology adopted to elicit reliable information is explained below.

METHODOLOGY

A one-way approach was adopted to collect primary data, and attention was focused on selected members of fishermen co-operatives in the study area. The data pertaining to the perception of the members of the sample co-operatives was obtained through pre-tested schedules distributed among them.

SAMPLE DESIGN

There are three administrative divisions in Nellore district, namely Nellore, Gudur and Kavali. As on 31st March 2008, there were 156 fishermen co-operatives in the District, with a membership of 29,036. Division-wise, there were 44 fishermen co-operatives with a membership of 8,395 in Nellore Division, 54 fishermen co-operatives with a membership of 8,108 in Gudur Division, and 58 fishermen co-operatives with a membership of 12,533 in Kavali Division. In view of the time and operational constraints in adopting stratified random sampling technique, 78 (50 per cent) fishermen co-operatives were chosen as the sample co-operatives for an in-depth study. Further, 10 members from each society were selected at random for collecting factual information. Therefore, the total sample frame for the study included 78 Fishermen Co-operatives (22 in Nellore, 27 in Gudur and 29 in Kavali divisions) and 780 members (78x10 members) of the Fishermen Co-operatives in the District as a whole.

PROBLEMS FACED BY FISHERMEN

The fishermen in Nellore District face serious problems in the area of finance, production, marketing, storage, fishing inputs etc.,. For firsthand information, the sample fishermen were interviewed regarding their problems. It was found that almost all fishermen had some common problems relating to finance, production, marketing, infrastructure support from the government, and the implementation of the development programmes etc. There were also problems relating to inputs and equipment.

FISHING INPUTS AND EQUIPMENT PROBLEMS

In the fishing occupation, every fisherman requires essentially fishing crafts and gear, such as boat, net and “*Handi*” (container). Different types of boats, nets and *handis* are normally used by the fishermen. To equip oneself with the most appropriate and durable fishing tools such as these, it naturally requires a considerable sum of money.

✿ **Fishing Crafts** : Fishing boats are of two kinds, non-mechanised and mechanized. Most of the sample fishermen used the traditional non-mechanised wooden boats. Now-a-days, the use of fibre boats is quite common. Use of glass boats has also started recently. Different types of boats of different costs are used by the fishermen depending on their requirement and financial capabilities. The price of a boat used by the fishermen was found to be ranging from ₹ 3,000 to ₹ 9,000 approximately.

✿ **Net** : Nets to catch fish are equally essential. The cost of a net is treated as a fixed cost, because it does not change with the quantity of fish caught. Different types of nets of different quality and sizes are available. Nets with different sizes of mesh are used for catching fish of different sizes. They are usually made of nylon thread. The prices of nets used vary from fisherman to fisherman, depending upon his requirement and financial capability.

✿ **Handi** : The '*handi*' is a fixed asset and is as essential as a boat and a net. It is a container which is used for keeping the fish after catching them. The price of a *handi* varies according to its size and quality. Fishermen purchase different types of *handis* depending upon their requirement and economic condition.

STORAGE PROBLEMS

Fish and fish products are highly perishable. Attempts are, therefore, made to dispose off stocks as quickly as possible, even at a smaller margin of profit. Even then, some storage facilities for preserving the fish are inevitable during their transfer from one agency to another before they reach the consumers. Different methods of preservation and storage

are described below :

✿ **Methods of Preservation** : There are various methods of preservation such as drying, salting, smoking, and canning, and the more modern methods of freezing with ice.

✿ **Drying** : First of all, the fish have to be washed with clean water to remove the slime, stains, mud and sand sticking to them. Then, they have to be dried to remove moisture from their tissues . This helps to arrest bacterial and enzymatic infection. Sun drying is the most ancient method, and is applied mainly on small marine fish. However, it is not an ideal way of preservation. It has certain disadvantages, and it is not hygienic. So, the recent trend is to use mechanical driers, which help to maintain high quality, natural favour and nutritional value of the catch.

✿ **Salting** : This method of preservation is used not only in the case of fish, but is also used for vegetables and foods. It prevents bacterial growth by inactivating the enzymes. There are two methods of salting: **1. Dry-Salting**, and **2. Wet-Salting**.

✿ **Canning** : Canning is the method of food preservation in which selected food materials are prepared and packed in tin or glass containers capable of being sealed airtight, heated sufficiently to destroy the spoilage organisms within the container, and cooled rapidly. Containers for canned foods are normally made of tin plates, but aluminum modifications are now popular.

✿ **Refrigeration** : The most-recent method of preservation of fish is refrigeration and freezing, which prevent rotting and decay. Frozen fish retain their nutritive qualities for a long time, perhaps even for a year. Fish are packed in ice for short-term preservation in markets or for transport. For long-term preservation, large electric refrigerators or deep-freeze cabinets are employed. Quick freezing is necessary where fish have to be kept for a longer period. Cold storage preservation of fish is not yet widespread in Nellore District. Only limited crush-ice facilities are available, where fish are kept overnight by dealers , before marketing them on the following day.

PROBLEMS OF FISH MARKETING

Fishermen in Nellore District know little about modern marketing. In the absence of a well-developed marketing system, intermediaries take advantage of the situation and usually deceive the fishermen in different ways. The fishermen are generally very poor, and they are not at all organized. Moreover, they cannot get financial assistance easily from banks and other financial institutions. In most of the cases, the fishermen take money in advance from the middlemen, and therefore, they are bound to sell their produce to the middlemen themselves at a lower price. Some of the other problems associated with fish marketing are mentioned below :

✿ **Unorganized Fishermen Community** : The fishermen community is not at all organized. The producers of fish (fishermen) come to the market without having adequate market information. Moreover, they deal individually in most cases. Unlike the unorganized fishermen, the buyers of fish are very well organized. They have a very strong bargaining power over the unorganized fishermen. As a result, the fishermen generally get a much lower price than what they are entitled to receive.

✿ **Forced Sales** : It is an open secret that fishermen in general and the small fishermen, in particular, are forced to sell their fish soon after catching them due to lack of storage facilities and their immediate need for money. As a result, the price offered to them is very low. Moreover, fishermen usually take money in advance from middlemen with a commitment to sell their produce to them at a lower price.

✿ **Lack of Storage Facilities** : Fish are a perishable item. So, they have to be sold as early as possible after catching or preserving them. However, scientific storage facilities are either not known to the fishermen, or they possess inadequate knowledge, and as a result, fishermen have to follow the traditional methods of preservation of their unsold fish. Most fishermen use crushed ice for storage purposes, which is an unsafe method. A substantial portion of the preserved fish is lost. Moreover, the quality of the fish also deteriorates. Therefore, inevitably, the fishermen have to undersell their catch.

✿ **Traditional Measurement (Weighing) System** : Surprisingly, both the old and new weighing systems are in vogue at the same time. As a result, the illiterate and ignorant fishermen are very often deceived by the middlemen.

✿ **Lack of Awareness of Market Information** : In spite of market information being available from different sources,

it was found that sometimes, self-centered moneylenders, commission agents, and middlemen mislead the fishermen, without giving them correct information about demand and supply, government policies, price fluctuation trends, etc. As a result, the fishermen as a community, due to their ignorance and lack of awareness, are deprived of the proper price for their catch, and allow themselves to be exploited.

✿ **High Cost of Distribution :** The places from where fish are produced and the places where they are marketed are not one and the same. Markets are generally situated in distant places. It is also found that many of the fish production places are not linked with marketing places with *pucca* (black - topped) roads. It has also been found that even *kachha* (dirt) roads, unfortunately, do not exist in remote fishermen villages. Moreover, quick means of transport needed for transporting fish are also inadequate at present. As a result, the fishermen themselves have to carry their catch from the production places to the markets. In the absence of fast moving vehicles, very often, fishermen cannot reach the market on time with the fish and thus, incur heavy losses as the unsold fish perish. To transport their fish to the markets on time, they need quick means of transport.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Without adequate infrastructure facilities like storage, transportation, modern crafts, ice plants etc., it would be difficult for fishermen to maintain their fishing activity at the optimum level. To enable them to work efficiently and effectively with a sense of security and confidence, a congenial atmosphere has to be created. The state government, for its part, can help them in this regard through fishermen co-operatives.

TRAINING FACILITIES

The fishermen have no facility for training in modern technology of fishing to improve their efficiency. Of course, the government has, as a matter of policy, decided to impart training to the fishermen on modern lines, but training facilities have not reached fishermen in the district in any significant way.

INDEBTEDNESS OF FISHERMEN

A majority of the fishermen are indebted to middlemen. They have to depend on them, although the benefits they get are meager. The middlemen exploit the fishermen by charging them a very high rate of interest and giving a low price for their catch. Compelled to work for the middlemen, the fishermen have no choice but to put up with these problems.

NATURAL CALAMITIES

The Fishermen are affected frequently by natural calamities like floods, cyclones; heat waves in the summer, etc. Their lot is the most distressing because they have to continue fishing in these circumstances, as fishing is the means of their livelihood. Owing to seasonal variations, problems of under-employment and limited income make the lives of fishermen miserable.

FINANCE

Finance is an ever-recurring and crucial problem for the fishermen, for they do not get adequate finances through their

Table No. 1 : Financial Problems Faced By The Fishermen		
Sl. No.	Difficulties	Respondents (n=780)
1.	Non-availability of required finance.	380 (48.71)
2.	Lack of financial support from Commercial and Co-operative Banks.	470 (60.26)
3.	Lack of direct finance from the government.	280 (35.90)
4.	High interest rates on loans.	200 (25.64)
5.	Limited own funds.	325 (41.67)
Source: Authors' Research		

co-operatives and lack enough working capital to purchase fishing nets and modern sophisticated fishing crafts essential for their fishing activity to keep them alive throughout the year. Therefore, the fishermen are forced to employ themselves for a limited time only, for the fishing activity alone cannot sustain them for a complete year. Many face unemployment in fishing for want of financial assistance. Many turn to middlemen for help, who without any compunction, exploit them. Problems of production and marketing are other attendant problems. For lack of adequate finance, often, their fishing activity is interrupted. The fisheries sector as a whole suffers because of scanty financial assistance. This shortage of working capital brings the fishing activity to a standstill. Further, it also results in unemployment and underemployment of fishermen. As the fishermen have more than one problem relating to finances, their responses were multiple. The Table 1 presents all these details, as experienced by the sample fishermen.

Table 2 : Logistical Problems Faced By The Fishermen		
Sl. No.	Difficulties	Respondents (n=780)
1	Traditional Crafts	210 (26.92)
2	Non-availability of Quality Manure	330 (42.31)
3	Scarcity of hired labour	230 (29.49)
4	Non-availability of Quality Fish Seed	200 (25.64)
5	Lack of technical knowledge	200 (25.64)
6	Seasonal problems	450 (57.69)
7	Lack of feed processing units	170 (21.80)
Source: Authors' Research		

The Table 1 shows that for 380 (48.71 percent) surveyed fishermen, non-availability of required finances was the major problem. For 470 fishermen (60.26 percent), lack of financial support from commercial and co-operative banks was the main problem. For 280 (35.90 percent) fishermen, lack of direct finance from the government was the most important problem. High interest rates on loans was the problem area for 200 fishermen (25.64 percent), and limited personal resources was the problem for 325 fishermen (41.67 per cent). It is clear that in general, all the respondents faced problems relating to finances.

LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS

The fishermen in Nellore District faced many problems in the fishing area. As many of them depended on outdated crafts for fishing, their output was low and the cost of production was very high. Lack of fishing inputs, technical knowledge, storage facilities, transportation and marketing facilities and exposure to frequent natural calamities were other problems which adversely affected the fishing activity. As the sample fishermen had more than one problem relating to logistics, the responses of the fishermen were multiple. The Table 2 presents these problems and responses. As the Table 2 shows, for as many as 450 (57.69 per cent) fishermen respondents, their vulnerability to seasonal problems such as calamities like cyclones, heavy rains, tsunamis, earthquakes, heat waves in the summer and non-suitable climate in winter was the real problem. In the coastal belt, usually, natural calamities cause havoc for the fishing industry. In Nellore District, almost all the fishermen bitterly experienced the havoc caused by cyclones and other adverse climatic conditions. The fishermen get restricted in their fishing activity by the vagaries of seasons, and can fish only during some seasons and for the rest of the year, they have to depend on other sources of income. When natural calamities have their sway in the district, during those periods, fishermen will have no work and therefore, no food. During some years of natural calamities, starvation deaths are also recorded in Nellore District. During the days when fishermen have no work, they are at the mercy of middlemen or master fishermen. Naturally, therefore, the fishermen are forced to fish for the middlemen at nominal rates, and are exploited mercilessly by them.

Another serious problem in the area of logistics was the non-availability of quality manure. As Table 2 shows, for 330 (42.31 per cent) fishermen, this was the most severe problem. In Nellore District, inland fishermen have to get manure from the co-operatives, but the co-operatives are unable to supply quality manure to meet the total requirement of the fishermen to keep them fully engaged in the fishing activity. Further, the manure supplied by the co-operatives is not

Table 3 : Obstacles Faced By The Fishermen While Selling Their Catch		
Sl. No.	Difficulties	Respondents (n=780)
1	Traditional way of marketing	400 (51.28)
2	Middlemen domination	350 (44.87)
3	Lack of storage facilities	320 (41.03)
4	Contractual marketing	330 (42.31)
5	Price fluctuations of catch	280 (35.90)
6	High commission charge	250 (32.05)
Source: Authors' Research		

of good quality, which leads to spoilage of the catch. The low-quality manure spoils the catch, resulting in low quality fish at high cost. Therefore, the fishermen are forced to depend on middlemen for quality manure and finances. Scarcity of hired labour was a serious problem for 230 (29.49 percent) sample fishermen. The fishermen found it difficult to find sufficient hired labour during the fishing season. Non-availability of quality fish seed was the problem for 200 (25.64 percent) fishermen. Frequent non-availability of quality fish seed brought work to a standstill, and the fishermen have to wait endlessly for quality fish seed, while so many man hours are lost. 200 (24.64 per cent) fishermen reported that lack of proper technical knowledge was a huge problem for them. Many among the sample fishermen wished for technical knowledge and training. For 210 (26.92 per cent) fishermen, their dependence on traditional crafts was the problem. It was observed that the majority of the fishermen in the study area did not possess modernized fishing crafts. Under the Modernizing Crafts Scheme, only an insignificant number of fishermen availed of this facility. In order to improve productivity and minimize the cost of production, modernized fishing crafts should be used. The sample fishermen in the district expressed their dissatisfaction with the implementation of the development programmes meant for their benefit.

Table 4 : Problems Related To The Fishing Activity							
Sl. No	Difficulties	Response in order of severity			Weighted Score	Rating in (%)	Rank
		1	2	3			
1	Non-availability of Quality Fish Seed	60	70	50	370	7.91	5
2	Lack Information on Market Prices	40	50	40	260	5.56	10
3	Scanty Financial Resources	110	100	90	620	13.25	2
4	Lack of required and timely help from the Govt. and Banks	130	120	100	730	15.60	1
5	Inefficient Management of Co-operatives	60	50	65	345	7.372	6
6	Lack of Marketing facilities	50	75	80	380	8.12	4
7	Floods and Cyclones	40	50	30	250	5.342	11
8	Lack of Knowledge of Tidal Fluctuations	60	30	45	285	6.09	9
9	Indiscriminate exploitation of Fishery Resources	55	60	50	335	7.158	8
10	Lack of Modern Crafts and Gears	65	60	80	395	8.44	3
11	Lack of fuel supply	60	45	70	340	7.26	7
12	Dependence on traditional fishing crafts and gears	30	40	50	220	4.70	12
13	Lack of Infrastructure	20	30	30	150	3.21	13
	Total	780	780	780	4680	100.00	
Source: Authors' Research							

PROBLEMS FACED WHILE SELLING THE CATCH

The sample fishermen faced problems in sales. Sale of the catch mainly depended upon their quality, price, customer satisfaction etc., but these fishermen were not able to maintain the required quality, and they were not in a position to control the cost of production, which resulted in high prices of their catch. The Table 3 provides information about the various problems of the fishermen in selling their catch. The Table 3 reveals that for 400 (51.28 per cent) fishermen, insufficient sale of their catch, because of the traditional ways of marketing, was the obstacle. Middlemen domination in the market while selling their catch was a problem for 350 (44.87 per cent) fishermen. For 330 (42.31 per cent) fishermen, contractual marketing was the problem. Lack of storage facilities was the problem for 320 (41.03 per cent) fishermen. For 280 (35.90 per cent) fishermen, price fluctuation was the problem for marketing their catch. For 250 (32.05 per cent) fishermen, high commission charges that have to be paid by them was a major hindrance during the sale of their catch.

GENERAL PROBLEMS THAT PLAGUE THE FISHERMEN

Many problems faced by the fishermen were in the area of finance, material, production, fishing crafts and gears, marketing and other infrastructure required by them. The sample fishermen were asked to report their problems one after another, in the order of severity. The weighted score was calculated based on the responses given by them. Accordingly, ranks were also assigned to the various problems faced by them in the three divisions of the district together. The Table 4 presents all the problems of the fishermen. From the Table 4, it may be observed that the problem of lack of timely financial help from the government and banks was the most important problem (15.60 per cent) for 130 fishermen, for 120 fishermen, it was the second most important problem, and for 100 fishermen, it was the third most important problem. The problem of scanty financial resources was ranked second (13.25 per cent). For 110 fishermen, it was the most important problem; for 100 fishermen, it was the second most important problem, and for 90 fishermen, it was the third most important problem.

Lack of modern fishing crafts and gears was ranked as the third (8.44 percent) most important problem. For 65 fishermen, it was the most important problem, for 60 fishermen, it was the second most important problem, and for 80, it was the third most important problem. Lack of marketing facilities was rated as the fourth most important problem (8.12 percent). It was the most important problem for 50 fishermen, the second most important problem for 75 fishermen, and the third most important problem for 80 fishermen.

The problem of non-availability of quality fish seed was ranked fifth (7.91 percent). For 60 fishermen, it was the most important problem, for 70 fishermen, it was the second most important problem, and for 50 fishermen, it was the third most important problem. Inefficient management of co-operatives was ranked as the sixth (7.37 percent) most important problem. It was the most important problem for 60 fishermen, the second most important problem for 50 fishermen, and the third most important problem for 65 fishermen. Lack of fuel supply was ranked as the seventh most important problem (7.26 percent). For 60 fishermen, it was the first most important problem, for 45 fishermen, it was the second most important problem, and for 70 fishermen, it was the third most important problem. Indiscriminate exploitation of fishery resources was ranked as the eighth (7.16 percent) most important problem. For 55 fishermen, this was the first most important problem, it was the second most important problem for 60 fishermen, and it was the third most important problem for 50 fishermen. Lack of knowledge of tidal fluctuations was ranked as the ninth most important problem (6.09 percent). It was the first most important problem for 60 fishermen, the second most important problem for 30 fishermen, and the third most important problem for 45 fishermen. The problem of lack of information on market prices was ranked as the tenth most important problem (5.56 percent). It was the first most important problem for 40 fishermen, the second most important problem for 50 fishermen, and the third most important for 40 fishermen. The problem of floods and cyclones was ranked as the eleventh most important problem (5.34 percent). It was the most important problem for 40 fishermen, the second most important problem for 50 fishermen, and the third most important problem for 30 fishermen. The problem of dependence on traditional fishing crafts and gears was ranked as the twelfth most important problem (4.70 per cent). It was the first most important problem for 40 fishermen, and the third most important problem for 50 fishermen. The problem of infrastructure was ranked thirteenth (3.20 per cent). It was the first most important problem for 20 fishermen, the second most important problem for 30 fishermen.

It is quite clear from the above analysis that because of the afore - mentioned problems, the fishermen in the district

have not flourished and in turn, the fishermen co-operatives also have been unable to thrive. Concerted efforts are necessary by all concerned – the fishermen, their co-operatives, the government, marketing agencies, etc. – to remedy the lot of fishermen in Nellore District and elsewhere, to enable them to contribute their might for the development of the country's economy.

SUGGESTIONS

It would be appropriate to offer some suggestions for consideration in the light of the observations made in the present study of the working of fishermen cooperatives in Nellore district. It is hoped that these suggestions would be helpful in overcoming the problems of the fishermen. Skillful, committed and efficient fishermen can emerge only when fishermen function efficiently and are successful. It is urged that the Government and other allied agencies come forward to create confidence in the minds of the fishermen. The suggestions are listed below :

- ✿ Those in the fishing community, who still depend upon traditional methods of fishing and use non-mechanized fishing crafts and gears have to be encouraged to adopt modern technology to upgrade their traditional crafts. For this purpose, they have to be provided with the necessary assistance, and their interests have to be protected for fishing in coastal inshore areas.
- ✿ The Government should provide and encourage the fishing community to involve their children in the fishing activity after they have attained the essential minimum education. This would reduce the disappointment among the youth, and they would become self-reliant and self-confident. The Government has to formulate a precise package of schemes of assistance in order to attract as many people as possible to undertake the fishing activity.

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