



## Livelihood Of Fisherwomen Community - An Analysis

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### Abstract

The worldwide pandemic situation, COVID – 19 has unpredictable impacts on all the sectors of the economy all over the world and is no exception to the fishing sector. The fishing sector plays a very crucial role in the economy by satisfying food and employment to millions of people and narrating the cultural identity of many coastal communities and contributing to keeping them fishing communities across India. A sudden India-wide lock-down, with just four-hour notice during COVID – 19 outbreak turned many Indian fisherwomen's livelihood upside down. Though the lockdown may help reduce the spread of coronavirus; but has a chronic impact on the livelihood of vulnerable populations i.e. fisherwomen, particularly on food systems, storage, and market chains both locally and regionally. Mumbai has a wide coastal line on which most of people depend on fishing for their bread and butter. As an impact of the current pandemic, a number of fisherwomen lost their employment and suffered increasing poverty and inequality. With a large number of fishing days lost because of Cyclone in 2019 and now the pandemic, fisherwomen have been looking for support to run their daily lives. They still await their full- fledged fishing days to begin.

**Keywords:** COVID–19, Chemical Cycles, Traditional Fishermen, Fishery Value Chain, Exclusive Economic Zone, Environmental Factors.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The fishery is a primitive and important sector in most of the developed & developing countries of the world from the viewpoint of subsistence options for the inhabitants of the coastal line of the country since times immemorial. The experience in these countries indicates that a natural resource along with the marine environment of the fishing sector stimulates the growth process of the economy inherently acting as supportive protective habitat. Fisheries play a significant role in augmenting the food supply & increasing the nutritional level of the population.

### NATIONAL SCENARIO

After the declaration of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in 1977, the area available to India is 2.02 million km<sup>2</sup>, comprising 0.86 million km<sup>2</sup> on the west coast, 0.56 million km<sup>2</sup> on the east coast & the 0.60 million km<sup>2</sup> around the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Indian fisheries are a vital component of global fisheries & the sector has been recognized as a powerful income & employment generator. It can increase the number of subsidiary industries & is a source of cheap & nutritious food. The contribution of this sector to foreign exchange earnings is very substantial.

### STATE SCENARIO

The fishing industry occupies an impressive and peerless place in Maharashtra's economy. Maharashtra with a territorial area of 307713 Sq.km. has a Coastal line of 720 km & a Continental shelf is 112 (000 sq.km.) & possesses 152 fish landing centers.

### GEOGRAPHY OF MUMBAI REGION

Mumbai stands at the mouth of the Ulhas River on the Western Coast of India. It lays a salsette Island, partly shared with the Thane district. Mumbai is bounded in the west by the Arabian Sea. Many parts of the Mumbai lie just above sea level, with elevation ranging from 10 meter to 15 meter i.e. approximately 33 Feet to 49 Feet above sea land specifically, North Mumbai (salsette) is hilly areas. The Mumbai City has particularly an average elevation of 14 meter and highest point in the Mumbai is 450 meters at salsette in the Panai-Kanhari ranges.

Mumbai comprises of two divergent regions i.e. Mumbai City District & Mumbai Suburban District. Both regions form two distinct revenue districts of Maharashtra. The Mumbai City districts region is also broadly referred to as the Island City or South Mumbai. Mumbai is occupied an area of 603.4 km<sup>2</sup> out of this the island city covered 67.79 km<sup>2</sup> while, Suburban districts covered 370 km<sup>2</sup>. Mumbai City districts as well as Mumbai suburban districts together covering for 437.71 km<sup>2</sup> which is under the administration of Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) & the remaining area belongs to Borivali National Park, Atomic Energy Commission, Defense & Mumbai Port which are out of the jurisdiction of the BMC.

**PROMINENT VARIETY OF FISH PRODUCTION BY TRAWL NET**

SR. NO	FISHERY/ PROMINENT VARIETY	MUMBAI
1	Elasmobranches	1271
2	Eels	486
3	Cat Fish	1363
4	Ancheveilla	1519
5	Harpodon Nehereus	4940
6	Otolithes	8295
7	Ribbon Fish	8406
8	Pomfret	350
9	Mackeral	847
10	Seer fish	572
11	Prawns	22235
12	Shimps	7375
13	Lobsters	113
14	Lactarius	393
15	Cephaloponda	7084
16	Others	20736
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>85985</b>

**Source:** Fish Production Report, Department of Fisheries, Government of Maharashtra.

**2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**Anjani Kumar (2004)** describes in detail the export performance of Indian fisheries. Fisheries exports have marked tremendous growth during the period 1987-2000 and the exports basket of fisheries products has become reasonably diversified. Export of frozen fish mark the highest annual growth, but prawns and shrimps constituted the major category of exports, capturing an impressive five percent of the major category of exports, capturing an impressive five percent of the world export market.

**Census of India (2001)** describe a user – friendly summary of the tables of household amenities, housing and assets as published at India level for quick reference for the total, urban and rural areas separately. There is also a collection of maps on selected themes, which helps to understand the status of various indicators in different States and Union territories. The main focus of research was on where and how people live, to find us to have an idea of the quality of life.

**3. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY**

In India, the fisheries sector is playing a crucial role in the socio-economic development of the economy. Its role is significant in providing food and employment to millions of people and contributing to National GDP. The pandemic was hit hard by Mumbai fishing communities where thousands of fisherwomen faced chronic problems of food and employment. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to analyze the multi-dimensional economic impact of the fisheries sector from the pandemic in India as a whole and Mumbai in particular.

With this background the present study “**Impact of COVID – 19 on the livelihood of fisherwomen community in Mumbai, Maharashtra: an analysis**” has been formulated with the following objectives.

- 1) To study the significant of fisheries sector in India.
- 2) To study the impact of COVID -19 on the fisheries sector in India.
- 3) To analyze the impact on the livelihood of the fisherwomen in Mumbai.
- 4) To overview the future prospects of fisherwomen in Mumbai.
- 5) To suggest the policy recommendation to ameliorate this shock.

Consistent with the objectives of the study, different techniques have been used for the analysis of the data. The data pertaining to the study has been analyzed and presented in tabular form to make the finding meaningful and easily understandable with simple statistical tools of analysis like ratio, percentage etc. The present study was based on two sources of data viz. primary data and secondary data, Primary data is the first hand information collected from the fisherwomen community of Mumbai to know the impact of the pandemic on their lives in terms of decrease the level of

employment and income. The primary data was collected through direct interview method from sample population of 500 fisherwomen. The secondary data relate to present study was mainly collected through secondary source which include various official reports, periodicals, magazines and websites etc.

#### 4. ANALYSIS

The small scale fisheries sector, also known as artisanal or traditional fisheries, are practiced by fishermen who use unique methods of fishing based on natural tidal patterns and seasons, small boats, go fishing for limited periods, make few trips and use relatively less fossil fuels in the overall fishing activity. The sector is prominent for India's coastal development programs as it is a major contributor of employment, food security and export earnings. Small scale fisheries contribute to a significant amount of catch in the coastal communities of India.

The ICSF (International Collective in Support of Fish Workers) estimates that about half of all small-scale fish workers accounted for are fisherwomen. Small-scale fishing methods are important and essential in ensuring sustainability in fishing, and marine wildlife habitats, and ensuring cultural and traditional knowledge is protected. And, as it has been with the workforce in other professions, here too, it is the women fishers who have suffered dearly in the pandemic.

Maharashtra's women fish sellers, who dot the state's coastal landscape carrying loads of fish on their heads, are now struggling to survive.

**Table 2. Income level of fisherwomen community during Pre- COVID, Lock-down and post-Lock-down Period in Mumbai.**

Regions	Average income per month ( Approx. In Rs. )		
	Pre-COVID	During Lock-down	Post Lock-down
Mahim	11,000	4,000	7,500
Worli	12,500	2,500	6,600
Versova	12,000	3,000	8,000
Juhutara	10,000	2,800	7,000

Source: Primary data

The above tables reveals that before COVID- 19, the fisherwomen had an average income of Rs. 11375/- p.m. whereas during lockdown its only Rs. 3075/- .The income levels dropped drastically to one fourth of income of normal period. Fishers have not yet ventured into the sea since 20<sup>th</sup> march 2020. As a result, marine fishers will effectively lose nearly 90 fishing days this year, so there is huge pressure among the fisher, fish vendor and fisherwomen as a result of this lockdown.

Sulochana Dhakle belongs to the Koli fishing community of Mumbai, which is considered the original inhabitant of the present day megapolis that once was seven separate islands. Koli claim it is the sweat and the blood of their past generations that have made Mumbai what it is today — a bustling state capital. But, amid the ongoing corona virus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the city has turned its back on the Koli community whose fisherwomen claim they are inching closer to destitution.

Sulochana *tai*, in her mid-60s, resides with her paralysed husband in Versova fishing village in western suburbs of Mumbai. Till some three months back, her mornings used to be very rushed, as along with the fellow fisherwomen, she would leave home at 2am and travel 27kilometres, in a tempo, to Crawford Market in south Mumbai to pick up fresh fish. By 4am she used to return home, cook for her husband, eat herself and leave to sell the fish. She would not return home before the evening.

“Four days in a week, I used to sell fish by carrying it in a basket on my head and moving from locality to locality. Some days I would earn Rs 100 only, other days Rs 300. That was the only source of my income, which also helped buy medicines for my paralysed husband,” Sulochana *tai* told. Now, for almost three months, I haven't earned a penny. I can barely feed myself and my husband. I have no money to buy his medicines,” she added. Out of habit, Sulochana *tai* still wakes up at 2am. To brood and occasionally cry over how a pandemic and an unconcerned government have turned Kolis destitute.

“At least 16 million fishers and fish workers are dependent on this sector for their livelihood, of which half are women,” T Peter, general secretary of National Fish workers' Forum, a federation of state-level trade unions in India. “The lockdown has badly affected the fishing community with no source of income. We have been demanding a special relief package from the Government of India, but, so far, received nothing,” he added.

The National Fish workers' Forum has asked to “immediately provide livelihood financial relief measure of Rs 15,000/month/fishing household across capture and allied sectors and include all workers, sorters, dryers, vendors

[without the limiting condition of Aadhaar card].” For fisherwomen who earn their living by selling fish, the Forum has demanded Rs 5,000 per month for the three months period of March, April and May.

“Versova fishing village has about 4,500-5,000 fisher families dependent on fishing activities for their livelihood. There are 400-500 boats that haven’t gone fishing since March due to the corona virus problem,” Pravin Bhanji, chairperson of Shiv Galli Koli Samaj Trust in Versova fishing village told. “There has been no earning for the last three months and now the annual fishing ban will come into force from June 1. How will we survive?” he wondered.

Every year, there is a 61-day fishing ban around the monsoon to protect the marine fishing wealth. To this effect, in March 2017, the Central government issued a notification on the ‘uniform ban on fishing by all deep-sea fishing vessels in the Indian exclusive economic zone (EEZ) beyond the territorial waters on the East Coast and the West Coast’.

The 2017 notification specified a 61-day fishing ban on both the coasts of the country, including Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, “for conservation and effective management of fishery resources and also for sea safety reasons”. All fishing activities are banned during this period except traditional non-motorized boats, which can continue fishing. On the East Coast of the country, this ban comes into force from April 15 till June 14, whereas on the West Coast, it starts on June 1 and ends on July 31.

### **IMPACT OF COVID – 19**

The semi-organized to the unorganized fisheries sector, particularly the small-scale fishers are the worst-hit in any national or global crisis. The characteristics of small-scale fishing—place of fishing, methods, sale, and storage mechanisms being diverse and unique to various communities, raise the following issues with respect to the lockdown:

- 1) Small-scale fishers sustain on a daily catch. The fish workers usually go fishing for short periods of time in the intertidal or sub-tidal region and their catch depends on the daily accessibility to the coast. The lockdown that mandates social distancing has essentially stopped access of the small-scale fishers to the coast for their daily catch. Most small-scale fishers operate in low numbers from one to five. They sustain on the daily catch for home, community consumption, and local sale.
- 2) Fisherwomen account for half of all small-scale fishers. The sale of the catch is dominantly carried out by this demographic and the lockdown means no catch; thus, no sale. Fish and fish commodities were not included in the list of essential commodities initially, with several state governments imposing complete lockdowns on markets. Due to this, we have seen several media reports of commercial fishers discarding their entire catch of fresh fish back into the sea as there is no option for sale and storage. The daily sale provides livelihood sustenance for fisherwomen and their families.
- 3) The spring catch for small scale fishers is an important phase of monetary sustenance. The catch is more diverse than other seasons and this monetary spring sale ensures sustenance for the community during the monsoon ban period. The monsoon ban period is also the period of repair and maintenance of nets and boats and without the spring catch and sale, this would add up to economic pressure on the community as they would require loans to carry out maintenance costs to be able to resume fishing post-monsoon and ban periods

### **MEASURES TAKEN SO FAR**

The measures taken up by the Centre involve providing immediate relief through monetary compensation to the affected community. The amount to each community or boat owner/laborer/fish vendor, etc. is ambiguous and unclear. The Centre also implied it would compile the number of affected fish workers, fish farmers, and fish vendors to provide this financial aid. However, for an unorganized and undefined sector like the small-scale fishers, this would warrant a mild chance for them to avail any relief through these monetary packages. Another component to consider is that the relief package will not contribute to a percent of the monetary spring sale that they would require to sustain the monsoons and ban period.

### **IMMEDIATE MEASURES ARE REQUIRED TO BE TAKEN**

The immediate measures for relief for small-scale fishers across the country during the lockdown would be:

1. Immediate relief by allowing access to the coast by issuing advisories and guidelines on the number of trips permitted per week. The maximum number of fish workers in these trips can also be limited and personal protection equipment (PPE) provided to eliminate health risks.
2. Include the sale of fish, especially local catch from small-scale fishers and the community, into the village and town horticulture shops that are currently selling vegetables and essentials to the villages and cities across the country. This would eliminate the risk exposure of fisherwomen and fish vendors for sale as the catch, like horticulture produce, would directly be brought by the government for sale in these ration shops. Additional hygiene advisories can be issued for sale of fish during the lockdown. This also ensures the catch is sold as per the market price and will not lead to unfair, low pricing or vice-versa.
3. If periodic markets are allowed, like in some parts of the country which are open only for a few hours, fish vendors and fisherwomen must be included into these markets and personal protection equipment (PPE) provided to such vendors with social distancing measures. Some fishing societies are already practicing these health guidelines in the sale of fish in their communities.

4. Monetary compensation must be allocated to registered societies than to individual accounts. The individual accounts scheme is eligible currently to only Aadhaar-linked bank accounts, which several fish workers in the commercial or small-scale sector do not possess or have access to currently. This also raises ambiguity in the proper dispersal of this monetary relief to the most affected during this period of lockdown

#### CONCLUSION

Our fisherwomen are already in a very bad condition with no income for the last so many months and the upcoming fishing ban will make our survival impossible. No fishing means no fish vending. Both the Central and the state governments need to address the concerns of the fishing community. The government must provide some financial support to tide over the lockdown losses.

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