

2.5 Kerala State-Level Workshop on the SSF Guidelines

Alappuzha, Kerala

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Organizers and Resource Persons

- Sunil K. Mohamed, Principal Scientist (Retired) and Head of the Molluscan Fisheries Division, Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI)
- A.J. Vijayan, Former General Secretary, Kerala Swatantra Matsya Thozhilali Foundation (KSMTF)
- Jackson Pollayil, KSMTF
- N. Venugopalan, ICSF

Introduction

The Kerala state-level workshop was conducted at Alappuzha by the Coastal Education and Development Society (CoEDS) with the support of ICSF on 4 January 2023.

There were 47 participants, including 10 female participants, from all the three zones: Trivandrum, Kollam and Alappuzha from the south zone, Ernakulam from the central zone and Kozhikkode from the north zone. A translated copy of the SSF guidelines in Malayalam was given to all participants.

Session One

Mohamed introduced the participants to sustainable use and management of fisheries by illustrating the issues and recommendations in the management of marine wild caught fisheries in India. He explained that fisheries management is the activity of protecting fishery resources so that sustainable exploitation is possible, drawing on fisheries science and the precautionary principle. The highlights of the presentation are as follows:

1. The regulatory measures in vogue are vessel registration and fishing licences, minimum legal size (MLS), closed fishing season (fishing/ trawl ban), protected species as per the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, closed fishing areas such as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) mainly in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and gear specifications (size/mesh control over destructive fishing practices).
2. Indiscriminate exploitation of large amounts of juvenile fish along with low-value biota collectively called as trash fish occurs all along the coast. Earlier, this catch, which included juvenile and non-edible fish, was accidental and bottom trawlers and fishers used to discard it. But now, trash fish are landed at harbours and landing centres and are transported to fish meal factories in neighbouring states for the production of shrimp, cattle and poultry feed.
3. Article 6.3 of FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) recommends that 'states should prevent overfishing capacity and should implement management measures to ensure that fishing effort is commensurate

with the productive capacity of the fishery resources, and their sustainable utilization'. The CMFRI has studied the issue of overcapacity of fishing fleets on an all-India basis and revealed that there is considerable amount of overcapitalization in the fishing fleets.

4. There is a global shift in the governance of fisheries to a broader approach that recognizes fishers' participation, local stewardship and shared decision-making in the management of fisheries. It is becoming increasingly clear that governments, with their finite resources, cannot solve all fishery problems. This approach is called co-management or participatory management. Fishers are empowered to become active members of the fisheries management team, balancing rights and responsibilities, and working in partnership, rather than antagonistically, with the government.
5. In order to be competitive in the global seafood trade (currently India's share of global seafood exports is 4% and growing), India needs to be proactive on seafood ecolabelling and, in future, aim for certification of its major globally traded fisheries. Since 2010, CMFRI and the World Wildlife Fund have been working together to get Indian fisheries certified. In 2014, the short-neck clam (*Paphia malabarica*) fishery of Ashtamudi Lake in Kerala became India's first to be certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). Currently it has not been re-certified due to lack of funds.
6. Accepting that maintaining fisheries in a sustainable manner is a necessity for steady and ongoing yields and employment from wild-caught fisheries in India, Fishery Improvement Projects are commonly used in many parts of the world to help fisheries meet the requirements of MSC certification.
7. The international challenges of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing occur in virtually all fisheries, causing problems for people who are trying to manage fisheries properly and for people who depend on fisheries for food and jobs. IUU fishing can cause an entire fishery to collapse. To tackle these issues, it is necessary to earmark the entire 12 nautical mile territorial waters zone as reserved for SSF.

Session Two

Vijayan set the context by outlining CRZ and Coastal Tenure Rights based on the SSF Guidelines. He emphasized the importance of bringing pressure to legislate the Guidelines, all aspects of which are a necessity. There was also a discussion on Kerala's coastline, local coastal constructions, coastal erosion and local coastal phenomena related to the construction of the Arthunkal Chethy Harbour, which the participants were very interested in, given the local aspects of the session. The highlights of the presentation were as follows.

1. The CRZ regulations, which practically ban all construction activities within a specified distance from the high-tide line, were framed during the early 90s with the aim to preserve the seafront and prevent pollution in the coastal regions.
2. The coastal area has always been a bone of contention between the powerful lobby of builders and the local people. In some cases, the tensions have run high

between the local community and the industrial units. This has led to a lot of acrimony and ill feeling. The local people are often left feeling that rich developers can bulldoze their way through the CRZ guidelines. It is a fact that people belonging to traditional coastal communities and living in the coastal regions demarcated under the CRZ were not allowed by the state governments to construct new houses and other civic amenities. Yet, the very same agencies are approving new plans and proposals to construct hotels and tourist resorts on beaches in clear violation of CRZ regulations.

3. The SSF Guidelines recommend that small-scale fishing communities have secure tenure rights to the resources that form the basis for their social and cultural well-being, their livelihood and their sustainable development. The Guidelines call on states to grant, where appropriate, preferential access to small-scale fisheries to fish in waters under national jurisdiction, with a view to achieving equitable outcomes for different groups of people, in particular vulnerable groups. Where appropriate, specific measures such as creating and enforcing exclusive zones for small-scale fishers should be considered.
4. It also calls on states to ensure that small-scale fishers, fishworkers and their communities have secure, equitable and socially and culturally appropriate tenure rights to the resources, with special attention paid to women.

Discussion

To a question on why there's a disparity in how the small-scale fishing sector and mechanized sector respond to restrictions (with the former largely following them and the latter ignoring them), the response from the resource people was that the traditional sector tries to conserve fish resources. Moreover, it is the government which should implement regulations.

Answering a question on eco labelling, it was highlighted that the first eco labelling of mussels at Ashtamudi Lake has been a huge success. Eco labelling will help to protect and maintain the sustainability of the traditional fishing sector.

Participants also sought to understand the various scientific and biological reasons behind the variations in fish sources. For instance, they wondered why sardine production, despite known to have decreased, saw an increase this season. The resource people clarified that production depends not only on climate change but also on over-exploitation and lack of nutrients for growth. The main food of the juveniles of sardines is a single-celled plant species. The growth of this organism depends on the availability of nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium (NPK) nutrients. It is abundantly present in the rain water from the mountain. It may be a reason for the increase in sardine production.

Feedback

Governments are bringing many legislations and plans to manage the fisheries sector which is currently going through a crisis. The participants shared that this programme had created awareness to understand how these rules, regulations and plans are suitable or not suitable for the fisheries sector. They insisted that it is necessary to conduct matsya sabhas like gram

sabhas at regular intervals. Traditional fishworkers are losing their work, tools and livelihoods due to adverse socio-ecological reasons. Fishers currently do not even have the right to fix the price of the fish they catch. They have reached the path of progress only through their hard work and the educational upliftment of their children.

The participants, who are state-level leaders working in the fisheries sector, suggested that studies alone are not enough and that the field also needs the support of authentic thinkers. These types of seminars will provide knowledge but special efforts are needed to bring it into practice. It will be more useful if the workshops are conducted at district and taluk levels. It will help reach more people and ensure representation.

It would also be, said the participants, if a simple book could be published on how the existing marine and coastal laws related to the fisheries sector will affect the future of sustainable fisheries. As there are different fishing methods used in different districts, it would be appropriate to prepare a detailed note with examples of how these fishing methods can be brought into traditional style. Instructions should include which fishing methods can be used, gear size, length, ownership, how much fish can be caught, which fish and when, etc. It would be great if the booklet could be published as a general awareness after district-, taluk- and state-level workshops.

Closing Remarks

In his closing remarks, Venugopalan suggested that a symposium be organized involving the representatives of all the traditional fishworkers' organizations and a priority-wise charter of demands be prepared to legislate the SSF Guidelines.