

Interventions of Local Self Government bodies in Fisheries development, management and livelihood

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INTRODUCTION

Fishing has a significant role in food security, employment and the economy of Kerala. Fishing creates a comprehensive network of economic activities, including direct selling, marketing, transportation, and local and international exporting. According to the government data, 1044361 fisher folks live in Kerala, as estimated in 2019-20, and the annual fish production in 2018-19 is 801757 tonnes (Government of Kerala, 2023). However, the traditional small-scale fish workers remain in the lower class of society and are economically and socially marginalised. According to the 73rd and 74th constitution amendment act, local government bodies are the primary institutional actors who bring developmental programmes for the progress of marginalised communities. Developing countries follow a bottom-up development and disaster management approach through democratic decentralisation. As the fishing community belongs to the lower strata of development, welfare programmes, sea safety and disaster management-related schemes are planned and managed by Panchayati raj institutions. In this background, this study enquires about the Interventions of Local Self Government bodies in Fisheries development, management and livelihood in fishing villages in Kerala.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Coastal villages in Kerala have divided into Mathsyagramam (fishing villages) for administrative purposes. There are 335 fishing villages in Kerala, of which 222 are coastal fishing villages and 113 are inland fishing villages. Currently, 247849 registered active fishermen and 92124 registered allied workers are in Kerala, who are the beneficiaries of various welfare programmes from the ministry of fisheries (fisheries department). Both Local bodies, as well as the department of fisheries, work independently and mutually for the fishing communities in Kerala. (Department of fisheries, 2023)

Matsya bhavan is the entity which incorporates various agencies for the welfare and development of the fishing community under the department of fisheries. Each local coastal body has a Matsya Bhavan, which helps local bodies to develop and execute welfare, safety and disaster management schemes. It also assists local bodies in locating beneficiaries under various welfare schemes. Agencies under the umbrella of Matsya Bhavan are; The Kerala State Co-operative Federation for Fisheries Development Ltd, commonly known as **Matsyafed**, which assists in the socio-economic development of fishing and allied fishery workers through various schemes (Fisheries department, 2023). **Kerala Fishermen's Welfare Fund Board (KFWFB)** economically supports fishermen and households by collecting small funds from fishermen and distributing triple of it during the non-fishing season. **Kerala State Coastal Area Development Corporation Limited (KSCADC)** assists with sustainable infrastructure development in coastal areas. **Society For Assistance to Fisherwomen (SAF)** is exclusively for the socio-economic development of women. Theeramythri is the lead programme under SAF, which promotes alternative livelihoods for fisherwomen by creating micro-enterprises. The **Agency for Development of Aquaculture Kerala (ADAK)** for fish production and the **Fisheries Resource Management Society (FIRMA)** build connections with other fisheries research agencies in India and abroad to update their knowledge in the field and incorporate it in planning. (Government of Kerala, 2017)

According to the Panchayati raj act of Kerala, improving fish production through the seed production and distribution of offspring in fresh water and the sea, facilitating fish catching by distributing accessories such as boats and nets, and ensuring sea security through awareness programmes and distribution of security tools are the Functions of local self-governments in fisheries. The local governments are also subject to facilitating fisheries through subsidised product distribution. Providing Market support through the advancement of marketplaces is another function of local bodies. (Kerala institute of local administration, n.d.)

METHODOLOGY

The study incorporates a mixed methodology by analysing both qualitative and quantitative data. Primary data has been collected from interviews with fishing communities, representatives and officials of local bodies, and local bodies' plan allocation and expenditure

details. Regional differences, socio-economic status of the fishing community, interventions of local bodies and sea safety are the elements considered for selecting local bodies. Valapad Panchayat of Thrissur District, Chemancheri Panchayat of Kozhikode District, Alappad Panchayat of Kollam District and Anchutengu Panchayat of Thiruvananthapuram District and Parappanangadi Municipality of Malappuram District are the selected local bodies. The study's findings derived from the field visit experiences, interviews and discussions and paper presentations held at the workshop on sea safety and fisheries management: training and capacity development of local self-governments in Kerala at the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) on 01-02 march 2023.

DISCUSSION

Chemanchery Grama Panchayat

Chemanchery Panchayat is known for the historically renowned Kappad beach in Kozhikode district. The fishing community is located in two fishing villages named Edakkadav and Kannankadavu. The assessment of the last five-year plans shows that the Panchayat's contribution to the welfare of the fishing community is minimal. Apart from giving study aids such as study desks and chairs to children of fish workers, no social initiative has a continuity. Distribution of life jackets for sea safety and provision of ice boxes for marketing facilitation has been done in earlier years. However, Corona pandemic paused the whole practice in 2020-2021. There was a project proposal for fish farming in freshwaters in the 2021-22 period under the Subhiksham programme of the government of Kerala. However, the project has not been implemented in the year. The government's Punargeham project is being implemented in the Panchayat to rehabilitate residents who live less than 50 metres from the tidal zone. Through this project, beneficiaries receive Rs 10 lakhs to buy land and construct a house. Apart from the initiation of panchayats, the department of Fisheries under the mathsyabhavan has various schemes for the children of fishermen as study aids, scholarships, public services and exam coaching. Fisherfolk gets technical support such as echo sounders and GPS-enabled tools at subsidised rates. The drinking water issues of the fish worker family still need to be resolved entirely. Expenditure of the Panchayat is less than five lakhs each year for fish workers from 2017-2022, which is a significant drawback.

Parappanangadi Municipality

Parappanangadi is the 6.8 km coastal region in the Malappuram district. In five years of Municipality spending for the fisher workers community, more importance has been given to distributing learning equipment for children and fishing aids for fishermen. The welfare programmes were not implemented for the fishing community during the Corona pandemic time. From the interview of fishermen of Parappanangadi, it is evident that; the 2018 and 2019 floods did not affect the region, but houses were damaged during the cyclones. At Alungal Beach, the cyclone destroyed some houses and has not been completely rebuilt. Earlier, there was the threat of coastal flooding, but the arrival of the harbour in 2020 and the construction of sea walls with the installation of large stones could reduce such issues.

Although the students got many benefits (bicycle, grant) through the department, the problem of drinking water and internet availability is yet to be fully resolved. Expenditure figures show that programmes for fisher workers have performed well in other years, except the Corona period. Theeramythri has introduced 36 micro-enterprises and one Theera Mythri Seafood Restaurant for the livelihood of women, and a majority of it sustain even after the challenge during Corona.

Alappad Gramapanchayat

Alappad is a 16 km long coastal village in the Kollam district. It is located on a narrow strip of land between the Arabian Sea and the TS Canal. The fishing community in Alappad is relatively educated and has a high socio-economic living standard compared to other coastal villages under this study. Activities of local leaders from the community have contributed to the growth of the community. The 'Velu Arayan' memorial is a tribute to the leader of the Araya community.]It is a village where 143 people died in a disastrous Tsunami in 2004. The post-Tsunami rehabilitation project is well carried out in the village, and fisher workers have comparatively better housing facilities. Punargeham project has a failure tendency in the village because fish workers are reluctant to leave the seaside because they live close to the sea, which eases their work and approachability. The high market price for buying new land and insufficient funds to build a house adds to the uninterest of fish workers in the Punargeham project.

While analysing the plan details of the panchayat in the last five years, it has given more importance to learning equipment. No project has been implemented in 2017-2018 and 2019-2020. Solar lanterns and necessary funds for making a pond for fish farming have been given

in recent years. Many schemes to promote fish farming fail in the panchayat because of salt water. Due to the rising sea, tetrapod fencing is coming up here in collaboration with the coastal development corporation and harbour engineering division. The drinking water problem has not been completely solved.

Anchuthengu Gramapanchayat

Anchuthengu is a coastal village situated in the northwest of Thiruvananthapuram district. Panchayat has an area of only 3.36 square kilometres, surrounded by the Anchuthengu Lake in the east and the Arabian Sea in the west. Fishing is the main income-earning activity of coastal people; earlier coir-making was also there. The primary issue faced by the people of the Panchayat is housing and drinking water. Among the projects carried out by the Department of Fisheries, the main ones are supplying engines to fishing vessels and providing marine safety equipment. In the educational sector, conducting various educational projects such as Entrance coaching, civil service coaching and PSC coaching are provided through Vidyatheeram (edu shore) scheme. Various awareness classes, edu-fest and medical camps have been held under the Village Management Council of each fishing village. SAF is providing alternative employment opportunities in this Panchayat through theeramythri. To stabilise women's livelihoods, SAF provides interest-free loans for group entrepreneurship. Small-scale entrepreneurs such as tailor shops, cloth shops and hotels are working under this. Although the two floods and Cyclone Ockhi did not affect the area, the storm and sea surge several times has made the condition of the houses in the coastal areas miserable. Housing problems are being solved to some extent through the Punargeham scheme and the LIFE scheme. The main problem seen there is that many people need more documents, and those who are relatively less educated have to take the help of middlemen to get many benefits. Already 5968 people have been registered in the Panchayat. The Panchayat's main welfare project for the fishing community for the past five years has been the distribution of study equipment such as tables, chairs and laptops for children of fisher workers. To catch and market fish, small wooden canoes (katta maram), ice boxes and gill nets were provided to fisher workers in previous years. The Panchayat distributed insulated boxes to women to sell fish. Subhiksha Keralam project has introduced new experiments to promote fish farming in ponds for the last two years. Under the Punargeham project, 777 people registered land, and now there are 2017 remaining to be benefited from the project. Drinking water is a problem which the Panchayat still has to find a proper solution to.

Valapad Gramapanchayat

Chappallipuram is the only fishing village in Valapad panchayat in the Thrissur district. Valapad Panchayat has successfully planned and implemented projects in the last five years (2017-2022). Apart from learning equipment for children of fisher workers, nets, lanterns, ice boxes and bicycles were provided to the fishermen to encourage fishing and marketing for a sustainable livelihood. The Panchayat has been able to implement projects like fish farming and laptop distribution within the constraints of the Corona period. Theeramythri has been encouraging small enterprises in the village with the initiation of 26 micro-entrepreneurial units formed by women groups. The involvement of the Panchayat in matters of sea safety is limited.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The socio-economic status of Fisher workers is weak in Kerala. Fisher workers in the state remain a marginalised community. The risk factors for fishing and people living in the coastal areas are increasing over time. Kerala is susceptible to several natural catastrophes and highly vulnerable to cyclones and disastrous weather problems. In past years disturbances in the sea have affected the social life of fisher workers across Kerala. Flooding occurred in Kerala in 2018 and 2019. Privatisation and tourism sector, land encroachment, sea mining and large-scale constructions are current challenges for people living in the coastal areas. Occasional sea surge has affected the Anchuthengu grama panchayat, Alappad grama panchayat and Parappanangadi municipality residents. Flood-like situation collapsed many houses. In 2021 may, three houses devastated in Alappad.

Local self-government and mathsyabhavan deal with the challenges of fisher workers. Matsya Bhavan, under the fisheries department alone, implements more schemes for the socio-economic welfare of fisher workers in all the local bodies selected under the study. The welfare fund board's savings relief scheme economically aids fisher workers in a difficult time. The department has a holistic welfare approach where it implements educational aids for children of fish workers, a marriage finance scheme, a medical scheme, fishing equipment distribution, a housing construction and insurance scheme etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Traditional fisher workers belong to the lower socio-economic strata; however, the grass root democratic institution does not have a special sub-plan such as a tribal or scheduled caste sub-plan. There is a need to address the issues of the fishing community with more developmental aspects.
- Sea safety should be brought under the Disaster management plan of the local body. Sea safety measures are to be taken more effectively by providing more awareness, distribution of tools, incorporation of technology and periodical degradation.
- A disaster response team should be formed in each fishing village representing fisher folks to ensure immediate interference in the rescue operation.
- Mechanisms such as the Matsya Sabha, which ensure the representation and democratic practice of planning programmes for the fish workers and address their needs and resolve them, should be encouraged, and monitoring and regulatory bodies should be formed.
- Although the support given to the entrepreneurial activities of Theeramythri and SAF movements for women is commendable, the considerable gender gap in the welfare schemes for women should be addressed with dynamic programmes.
- Drinking water remains a significant problem in all the local bodies under study. There should be localised and technology-driven plans to deal with the issue.
- The local bodies can promote livelihood models by strengthening the fish markets and improving fish processing and management through the regional economic development plan.
- Livelihood diversification is needed to overcome the social disadvantage of fisher workers.
- The development of health and education can achieve social mobility for fisher workers. Active involvement of local bodies in these sectors is needed. The promotion of alternate learning centres and nutrient monitoring through anganwadis is recommendable.
- The lack of project diversity shows the need for greater involvement of the local governments in Kerala in coastal security, expansion of sea safety measures, preparation of fish marketing markets, provision of social security, livelihoods of workers and dissemination of technology.
- As a democratic institution working at the grass root level for the welfare of people, the Local bodies have more to do with diversifying schemes to uplift fish workers.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the role of local self-governments in the socio-economic life of traditional fisher workers. The discussion was on livelihood, climate change and its effects, privatisation of resources, and sea safety of fishing communities in Kerala. Fish workers represent the primary food sellers in Kerala, and this community build a more extensive system of workers with different functions. The socio-economic parameters of development recognise the marginality of the fisher community. Effects of climate change have been seen in the land and sea, and coastal people are most prone to the impacts of climate change. Kerala witnessed tsunamis, cyclones, floods, sea surges and changes in the ocean for the last twenty-five years, which transformed the life of fisher workers. The emergence of tourism and privatisation of natural resources also have affected the environment of the sea, thus, the life of fisher workers. It causes changes in the ocean, destroys houses and properties, and leads to fatalities of coastal people which ends in the alienation of the community from the development.

The Punargeham project is offering better housing for fish workers. However, distance from the rehabilitating house to the sea prevents them from availing of the scheme, the inadequacy of funds to buy land in high market-valued places, cultural differences, and undemocratic practices are also hindering them from going to a different location. In contrast to the safety of traditional fishing practices, high vessels provide better protection for fishing people. Furthermore, safety is connected to communication and technology in this era. Advanced devices make communication and rescue operations easy. As a result of the identification of issues faced by the fish workers, the bottom-up approach has been found as an effective way to streamline the developmental process. The Panchayat or municipalities facilitate the fisher community by providing safety measures, fishing tools and educational support to fisher workers' children. However, there is a massive gap between fish workers and other social classes, except for the scheduled casts and tribes. There need to be more safety measures for the fishing people; more effective involvement is needed for the management of the livelihood of fisher workers. The aftereffects of climate change, geographical variations of the sea and the calamities are to be studied and taught and must be connected to the local body's larger disaster management frame. The needs of the fisher workers are to be protected by the active involvement of local self-government institutions. The communities' welfare and development rights are to be ensured by providing democratic powers. Local self-government bodies can play a significant role in the total development of fish workers. A coordinated effort between different departments is essential to identify the challenges of fish

workers, design schemes and implement various schemes and evaluate them.(Kurien & Paul, 2001)

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