

## Fish Cooperatives in Maharashtra-A Need of Transformation

Hema Yadav<sup>1</sup>, Mahesh Kadam<sup>2</sup> and Pravin Jadhav<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Director, Vaikunth Mehta National Institute of Cooperative Management, Pune. (M.S.)

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Vaikunth Mehta National Institute of Cooperative Management, Pune, (M.S.)

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Institute of Infrastructure, Technology, Research & Management, Ahmedabad, Gujarat

### SUMMARY

Fishery cooperatives are instrumental predominant step in increasing fish production and also in amelioration of social and economic status of fishermen. They are amply able to generate employment opportunities in different sectors of fishery industry like, fish processing, fish drying and fish curing, fish storage, fish canning, fish transport and proper marketing of fish and their by-products etc. After the Horticulture Sector, Fisheries ecosystem is will be a benchmark for the socioeconomic development of the agriculture and allied stakeholders in cooperative entities. The article focuses on the need, challenges and way forward for the Fishery and Fish cooperative ecosystem in Maharashtra. There is need to look in the Fish production, marketing and value chain infrastructure development in Maharashtra State with a handholding attributes from the expertise, cooperative institution building and new avenues from the technological interventions ecosystem. Government should overlook on above moves and take necessary initiatives to make the fish cooperative ecosystem more resilient and viable.

### INTRODUCTION

India is blessed with vast and varied resources of water, both freshwater and marine. The country is crisscrossed by 14 major perennial rivers. Our coast line extends up to 8129 km. and we have Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 2.02 sq Km. This all provides us ample opportunities of sustainable exploitation of aquatic resources. India ranks at number two in global fish production. She also holds second position in the world in aquaculture production as well as in Inland Capture Fisheries. Fisheries sector provides livelihood to over 1.60 crore people. Our total fish production in the year 2017-18 was recorded to the tune of 12.59 million metric tonnes with an average annual growth of 10.14% (Handbook on Fisheries Statistics, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying, Government of India, 2018).

Fishery in India is an important part of our economy. There are over 27 thousand functional primary fisheries cooperative societies having a membership of around 39.46 lakh fishers in the country, who are socially, economically and educationally backward. They need skill up-gradation to enable themselves to use at least medium technology in the field of fisheries and also need education for their managers/members of fishermen cooperatives to run their societies smoothly in a viable way. Therefore, there is an immense scope and need to help them by giving them identification in the mainstream of social strata.

Fishery cooperatives are instrumental not only in increasing fish production but also in amelioration of social and economic status of fishermen. They are amply able to generate employment opportunities in different sectors of fishery industry like, fish processing, fish drying and fish curing, fish storage, fish canning, fish transport and proper marketing of fish and their by-products etc. fish consumers are also directly benefitted from these societies as they easily get fresh fish at a fairly reasonable prices. No doubt, fisheries co-operative societies have a definite role to play in achieving the targets of 'NEEL 'KRANTI' (Blue Revolution) in India.<sup>2,3</sup>

### Maharashtra-Status, Challenges and Solutions in Fish Cooperative Ecosystem

There are 37 thousand fishermen cooperative societies in the state of Maharashtra, of which 73 percent (27 thousand) are closed. Only 27 percent (10 thousand) institutions are running and many of them are on the verge of closure. There are two types of fisheries in the state namely marine and freshwater. Hence the fishermen cooperatives are also divided into marine and fresh water. The problems of both these cooperatives are also different.

More Efforts in technological interventions must be made by the state government to strengthen the institutions; on the contrary, decisions are being taken as to how they will be undermined. Expertise, experienced decorum people views and moves may be taken into consideration when making decisions about fisher cooperatives. If Decisions go wrong or delayed, the rules, norms formed will also oppress the fishermen activities

and will lead to loosened policies and will hamper the ecosystem of cooperatives. Government's emphasis is only on setting up new institutions but a way forward and restricting of existing entities must be taken under consideration. The ponds are allocated on a hectare basis to fresh water bodies. These 150 to 200 hectares are controlled and look after by three to four institutions. In doing so, the fish in the pond cannot be controlled in the respective area. Therefore, endless problems arising in allocating such ponds and leads to mismanagement of the water bodies.

Availability of fish seed according to demand is also a major problem in freshwater fisheries. Maharashtra is not self-sufficient in fish seed, so we have to import fish seed from other states. It is also not available according to requirement, if available it is not of quality, their mortality is also high. Many times it involves infidelity and ignorance which leads to poor and substandard quality of fish seed availability to cooperatives. Marine fishing organizations were running on the returns they got from diesel. But now the fishing by trawlers is not yielding any fish so, the marine fishing activity has reduced.

Most of the trawlers are commercial borrowers and their arrears are being recovered from diesel refunds. Due to this, the co-operative societies along with the fishermen are in financial difficulties. Henceforth, If certain buy back moves or subsidized ways of providing diesel facility must be initiated by Government which will encourage or create new momentum in Marine Fisheries too. Some organizations have started fishing tackle shops. But due to the GST levied on the purchase and sale of such tools, these shops have also closed down. Some institutions depended on ice factories. But the competition has increased now. Some organizations are facing problems as they are not able to manage their work and finances. In order to revitalize fishermen's organizations, the government should focus on making the existing organizations economical by reducing the establishment of new ones. Drawing new amendments based on inadequate or imprecise information should also be stopped. All infrastructure facilities for fisheries should be provided to the cooperatives. The state will have to be self-sufficient in fish seeds. If this happens, farmers will get quality fish seed as per the demand. Fishery cooperatives should explore different ways of income generation. Cooperatives can earn money through alternative routes like marine tourism, ornamental fisheries, processing and value addition ventures, fishing and allied marine products production and processing etc.

Some of the demands of the local fishermen may be over looked, such as returning the ponds given to the corporation to the institutions, cancellation of the oppressive GST on fishing materials, waive off the fishermen's loans, etc. Government should overlook on above moves and take necessary initiatives to make the fish cooperative ecosystem more resilient and viable.

Importantly, sea fish have been depleted by unregulated fishing. Fresh water fisheries are also not producing as expected. High speed trawlers as well as unnatural fishing with LEDs should be stopped. Moreover, efforts should be made to increase freshwater fish production. If this happens, the economy of fishermen and their cooperatives will also improve.

## REFERENCES

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