

## Challenges Faced by the Fisheries Sector in India

Suvetha Venkatachalapathi

PhD Scholar, ICAR – Central Institute of Fisheries Education, Mumbai. (M.S.)

### SUMMARY

Over the years, the fisheries sector in India has transformed from subsistence to an important commercial activity in terms of income generation, GDP contribution, employment generation and entrepreneurial opportunities. The sector, comprising marine, inland, and brackish water fisheries, classified based on the salinity of the water. It can be further classified into culture and capture fisheries. The sector contributes to the livelihood of more than 16 million fishermen at the primary level and twofold the number across the supply chain. FAO emphasised the importance of fisheries in achieving SDGs related to food security and nutrition in the country, with fish being an affordable and rich source of animal protein. FAO created a road map for blue transformation to create efficient, inclusive and sustainable aquatic food systems by 2030. The importance of the fisheries sector is also reflected in its increasing contribution to both the gross domestic product (GDP) and foreign exchange earnings of the country. India contributes 8 percent to total world fisheries production. This article discusses the challenges faced by the fisheries sector in India.

### INTRODUCTION

The fisheries sector contributes significantly to India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and export earnings. The sector directly employs millions of people, including fishermen, fish farmers, and workers, in processing, packaging, and trading activities. It also supports numerous ancillary industries and services. As per the National Fisheries Development Board, the sector provides employment to over 14 million people. India is a major exporter of fish and fishery products. The country exports a variety of seafood products, including frozen shrimp, fish fillets, and processed fish. According to the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA), India earned USD 5.78 billion from seafood exports in the fiscal year 2020-21. The seafood export industry plays a crucial role in earning foreign exchange for the country. The availability of fish provides nutritional benefits to millions of people, particularly those living in coastal and rural areas. India has witnessed substantial growth in aquaculture, which is the farming of fish and other aquatic organisms.

### Challenges faced by the fisheries sector in India

The fisheries sector in India faces several challenges that affect its growth, sustainability, and the livelihoods of those dependent on it. Here are some key challenges faced by the fisheries sector in India.

**Overfishing and depleting fish stocks:** Overfishing, both in coastal and offshore waters, is the biggest challenge to handle as it affects sustainability. Unregulated and excessive fishing practices, including the use of destructive fishing gear and methods, lead to the depletion of fish stocks and the degradation of marine ecosystems. This threatens the long-term sustainability of fisheries and the livelihoods of fishers who depend on those resources. Environmental degradation also poses a major threat to the sustainability of inland fisheries. Loss of habitat and indiscriminate fishing, marine fishing has declined due to depleting resources, the energy crisis and the resultant high cost of fishing.

**Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing:** IUU fishing is a serious challenge that undermines fisheries management efforts. It includes activities such as unauthorized fishing, fishing in prohibited areas, and failure to report catches accurately. IUU fishing not only contributes to overfishing but also affects the socio-economic well-being of legitimate fishers. Strengthening surveillance, improving enforcement, and promoting international cooperation are crucial in combating IUU fishing.

**Climate change and its impacts:** Climate change is the biggest threat not only to fisheries but also to the overall development of a country and its economy. Climate change and its influence on the agricultural sector is widely studied by academicians nowadays; this shows the importance of the topic. Climate change poses significant challenges to the fisheries sector. Rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, and changing ocean currents can

affect fish migration patterns, reproductive cycles, and overall productivity. This can lead to changes in fish abundance and distribution, impacting the catch and livelihoods of fishermen. Adaptation strategies, such as diversifying fishing practices and promoting resilient aquaculture, are necessary to address these challenges.

**Coastal habitat degradation:** Coastal habitat degradation, including mangrove loss, coral reef destruction, and pollution, adversely affects the fisheries sector. These habitats serve as nurseries and breeding grounds for many fish species. Their degradation reduces the availability of fish resources and disrupts the balance of coastal ecosystems. Conservation and restoration efforts, along with better waste management practices, are essential to protect coastal habitats and sustain fish populations.

**Lack of infrastructure and post-harvest facilities:** Inadequate infrastructure, including cold storage facilities, processing units, and transportation networks, hinders the efficient handling and storage of fish. This results in post-harvest losses and compromises the quality of fish products. The lack of proper infrastructure also limits value addition and the ability to access distant markets. Investments in infrastructure development, particularly in fishing harbours and storage facilities, are necessary to address this challenge.

**Limited access to credit and financial services:** Many fishers face difficulties in accessing credit and financial services for investment in fishing vessels, equipment, and working capital. Lack of access to affordable credit prevents them from adopting modern technologies and upgrading their fishing practices. Expanding the availability of credit, promoting financial inclusion, and designing specific loan products for the fisheries sector can help them to overcome this challenge.

**Institutional and governance issues:** The fisheries sector in India faces governance challenges, including overlapping jurisdictions, weak institutional capacity and a lack of coordination among different agencies and stakeholders. These issues can lead to ineffective fisheries management, inadequate enforcement of regulations, and poor implementation of sustainable practices. Strengthening institutional frameworks, improving coordination among agencies, and promoting community participation in decision-making can address these challenges.

## CONCLUSION

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes effective fisheries management, sustainable fishing practices, community engagement, capacity building, and improved governance. Collaboration between government agencies, research institutions, fishing communities, and other stakeholders is essential for the sustainable development of the fisheries sector in India.

## REFERENCES

- Ayyappan, S. and Krishnan, M., (2004) Fisheries sector in India: Dimensions of development. *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*: 59(3): pp.392-412.
- Ayyappan, S. and Diwan, A.D., (2007) National Fisheries Development Board and Fisheries Policy.
- Bhatt, P., (2020) IUU fishing as a national security threat: revisiting India's domestic framework and compliance with international regimes. *International Law Studies*: 96(1): p.14.
- Blue Transformation - Roadmap 2022–2030. Rome. FAO; 2022. (Accessed on June 28, 2023)  
<https://www.fao.org/3/cc0459en/cc0459en.pdf>
- Handbook Fisheries Statistics 2022. India. Department of Fisheries; 2023. (Accessed on June 25, 2023)  
<https://dof.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-01/HandbookFisheriesStatistics19012023.pdf>
- Suvetha V. Entrepreneurial Opportunities in Agriculture & Allied Sectors: Entrepreneurship Opportunities in Fisheries Sector. Chennai. Notion Press; 2023