

Fisheries Cooperatives Society in India

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Our country, 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).

India has abundant fishery resources with great potential for substantial progress. **Fish Base** (Froese and Pauly, 2013) mentions that 862 species of freshwater fish are found in India. A total of 788 marine fish species landed along Indian coasts in 2017. We possess more than 10% of global fish biodiversity. Moreover, Fisheries sector contributes more than 5% of the agricultural GDP. But, despite being a 'sunrise sector', fishing business is not without so many constraints. Some of these constraints may be as follows:

- Most of the people engaged in fisheries for their livelihood belong to socio-economically backward communities.
- Lack of proper institutional support like infrastructure and finance.
- Non-availability of quality seeds.
- Lack of organized marketing.
- Non-availability of quick transport facilities.
- Poor technical skills of fish farmers.
- Paucity of funds/ Bank credits.
- Lack of participatory fisheries management.
- Social issues.

Hence, it was realized that fishermen and women should be organized at community level to overcome their problems and to improve their socio-economic status by incorporation of appropriate inputs from education, finance, marketing, communication, technology, transport, seed availability, health and Government policies etc., This idea gave birth to Fisheries **Co-operative Societies** in India. As early as in 1913 **the fishery co-operative movement** in India began when the first fishermen's society was organized under the name of '**Karla Machhimar Cooperative Society**' in Maharashtra.

Sir Frederic Nicholson, the then Director of Fisheries in the former Madras Province, was perhaps the first person who initiated the formation of Fishery Cooperatives in India. In 1944, 'fish sub-committee' on Agricultural policy committee recommended that both direct and indirect assistance should be given to the fishing

industry. In 1946, the cooperative planning committee recommended that state aid for the development of fishing industry should be given largely through cooperative societies. These societies are responsible for extending financial assistance to their members. They are also responsible for stocking and selling of fishing crafts and gears. In addition, they have also been entrusted to ensure appropriate marketing of fishery resources, fair pricing of fish farmers' commodities and availability of improved seeds. However, the fishery cooperatives grew at a very slow pace in earlier period of their inception. By 1944, there were hardly 200 fishery cooperatives in whole of India. These societies were mostly lending societies, mainly concerned with providing credit to their members. They have not emphasized much for cooperative fishing, processing and marketing. A major boost for fisheries sector, however, was realized after the commencement of the 'Five Year Plans' when the importance of fishery cooperatives was recognized. Since then a large number of fisheries cooperatives have been formed both in marine and inland sectors of the country. Presently, there are one National Level Federation, 7 state level federations, 108 central Level federations and 12,427 primary fishery societies functioning in different parts of India.

Types of Fishery Co-operative Societies: Broad types of fisheries cooperatives operational in different Indian states are as follows-

Broadly the types:

1. Producer's cooperative societies: Aims at production of goods and services based upon common ownership and management by a group of workers to eliminate the employee-employer relationship.

2. Fish consumer's societies: These are composed of agricultural workers and the middle class people who run a consumer store where fishes can be purchased at the wholesale prices and sold at market or lower price to the members.

3. Fisheries credit societies: These voluntary and mutual aid associations provide credit to their members on personal security or on the basis of nominal security.

4. Marketing cooperative societies: Run by the small producers for the promotion of their trade by selling the goods at reasonable prices and by eliminating middle men.

5. Insurance cooperative societies: To minimize the risk of their members and their produce these societies negotiate with insurance companies. Individual and group insurance policies for its member are purchased at comparatively lower premium.

6. Transport cooperative societies: They provide the services of vehicles and transport to their members at comparatively lower rates.

7. Storage cooperative societies: They provide storage facilities to their members for perishable items.

Objectives of the Fisheries Co-operative Societies:

Co-operative fishery programme largely aims at:

- Providing livelihood to more and more people in coastal areas through smooth fishing business.

- Intensification of fish production through introduction of mechanized boats.
- Supply of mechanized boats on credit to members of Cooperative.
- Supply of essentials like Kerosene, nets etc. to the fishermen.
- Maintenance of facilities and services like boat building yards, ice plants, cold storage, canning plants, transport vehicles.
- Proper marketing of fish and fish products and by-products.
- Recovery of loans from sale price of fish products, etc.
- Up-liftment of socio-economic status of fishermen and women.

Efforts to strength fishery co-operatives:

1. National co-operative Development Corporation (NCDC), New Delhi.

NCDC played a significant role in strengthening fisheries co-operatives by providing them assistance for building up of their share capital, establishment of service and repair centers for boats, setting up of canning units, fish oil and meal plants, net making units, construction of godowns, drying yards etc.

To augment the development of fishing co-operatives, NCDC has formulated a comprehensive policy for providing assistance to fishery co-operatives for different purposes that include-

- Purchase of operational inputs such as fishing boat nets and engines.
- Creation of infrastructure facilities for marketing (transport vehicles, cold storages, retail outlets etc.
- Setting up of processing units including ice plants, cold storages etc.
- Development of inland fisheries, seed farms, hatcheries etc.
- Preparation of feasibility reports.
- Appointment of experts under technical and promotional cell schemes.
- Integrated fisheries projects (marine, inland and brackish water).

2. National Fisheries Development Board (NFDC), Hyderabad.

NFDB, established in 2006, aims

- To realize untapped potential of fisheries sector,
- To augment fish culture,
- To promote fish processing and marketing,
- To promote application of modern tools of research and development for optimizing fish production,
- To provide special care and financial assistance to fishermen societies, Co-operative bodies, women, SC/ST, weaker sections, and under developed regions.

Significance/ Scope of Fisheries Co-operatives:

Fishery industry offers a big opportunity for exploitation of fishery resources of the coastal as well as inland waters. Despite a very high potential of fishery sector, the fishermen continued to remain socio-economically down trodden. They are mostly exploited by the middlemen and suffer a lot on account of their illiteracy, poor know how and technical inaptness. Institutional safeguards would be very effective against such exploitations. Fishery cooperatives are appropriate means to get rid of most of the demerits of fishing sector. They have enough potential to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the fishers. In fact, fishery co-operatives are directly involved in improving fishermen socially, physically and economically. This multidirectional influence is supposed to give a boost to rural development (Fig. 1).

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.

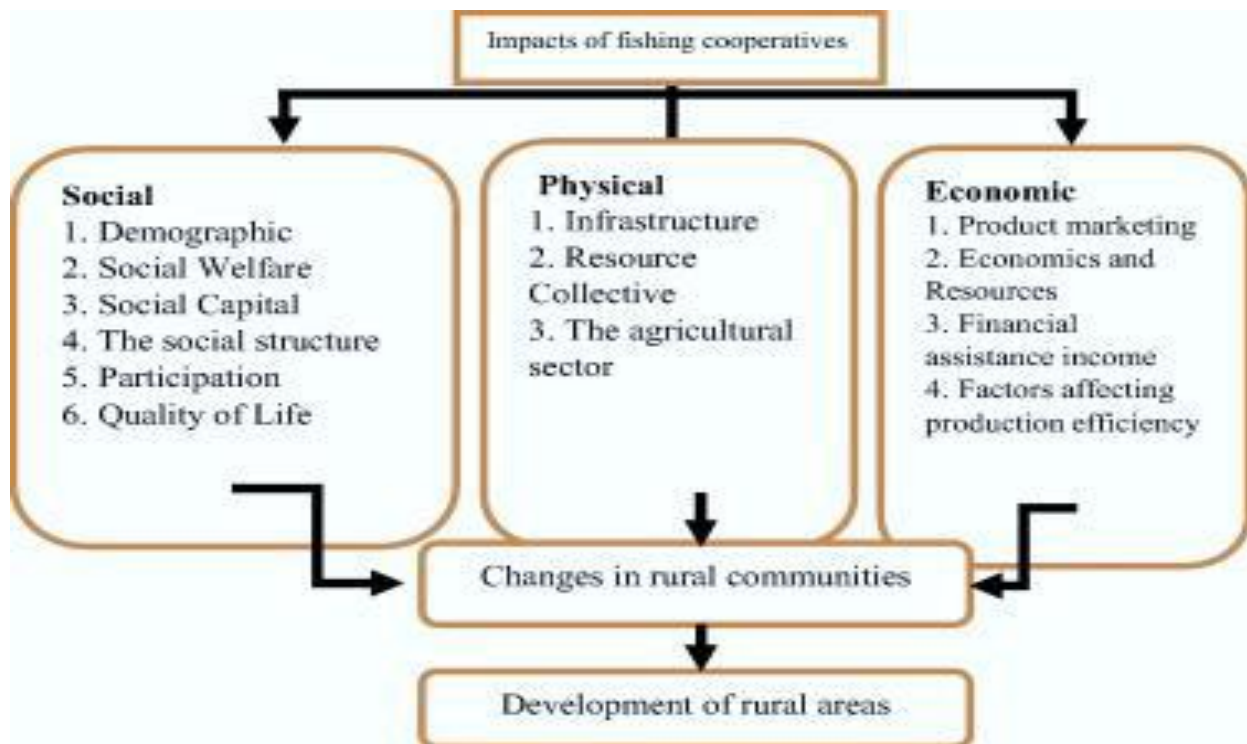


Figure 1. Impacts of social, physical and economic well being of fishing co-operatives on rural development.

(Source: M. Samian, H. Saadi, M. Asadi, K. Mirzaei, E. Ansari, E. Ahmadihagh and A. Soleymani. The role of fishing co-operatives on social-Economic and cultural development of rural areas of Bord Khun city of Bushehr, Iran. *J. Saudi Soc. Agri. Sci.*, **16**, 178-183 (2017)