

Preliminary Survey on the Primary Fishermen Co-Operative Societies (PFCS) of Murshidabad District of West Bengal

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Abstract

Fishery sector has high potentiality in our country. The fishery resources are very rich in West Bengal which is one of the leading fish producing states in India. Fishery cooperatives are developed in this state in the line of Indian cooperative movement. West Bengal occupies 4th rank as per the number of PFCS in India. Among the Districts of West Bengal, Murshidabad has the highest number of PFCS. A primary survey has been done in this district on the functioning of PFCS. The survey finds very grim picture about the performance of the co-operatives in the district. The suggestive measures for the improvement of PFCS in Murshidabad District have been proposed in this paper.

Keywords: Fishery; PFCS; Murshidabad.

Introduction

Our country stood second in fish production in the world after China. Fishery sector is very important in Indian economy and this sector contributed 0.92 % share to Indian GDP during the 2013-14 financial year. This sector can generate large scale employment, particularly in rural areas and may help in poverty alleviation.

The potentialities of Indian fishery is huge both in freshwater and marine sector, a major part of which is still remain in untapped condition. Fish is a good source of protein which has significant role in ensuring food security in 21st century. As the global population is increasing rapidly, there is an urgent need to increase the production of fish and other aquatic eatable animals for feeding the large number of people throughout the world.

Materials and Methods

The basic approach of the study is to collect data from primary sources by field surveys and secondary data from reports of Govt. of West Bengal and India and also from published articles in scientific journals. The data has been analyzed using statistical tools.

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Meaning and Concepts of Fishermen Cooperatives

A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

As the fishermen generally comes from weaker sections of the society, they lack necessary monetary resources, knowledge of technological advancements and organizational capacity required for better fish production, storage, processing and marketing. Due to low income, they usually borrow money from fish merchants at high rates of interest. Thus, there is a vicious circle of indebtedness fostering exploitation. Formation of fishermen co-operative society can solve all these problems and fishermen in different countries have adopted the co-operative system of working to improve their fisheries all round as well as develop their socio-economic condition.

History of formation of fishermen co-operative societies

- a. The modern co-operative society has its roots in England, when it started in 1844.
- b. The fishery co-operative movement in India began in 1913 when the first fishermen society was organized under the name of “Karla Machimar (Fishermen) Co-operative Society” in Maharashtra.
- c. The State of West Bengal was the next to organize cooperative societies in fishery sector in 1918.

Functions of fishermen Co-operative Societies

- a. Providing financial loan to fishermen as and when needed.
- b. Making available banking facilities for receiving financial deposits.
- c. Transport, processing, storage, and sale of fish catches.
- d. Propagation and conservation of fisheries resources on scientific lines.
- e. Establishment of facilities and supply of goods necessary for the fisheries.

- f. Activities for the prevention of disasters, disaster relief and boat insurance.
- g. Activities for education and dissemination of information related to fisheries.

Organizational structure of fishermen Co-operative Societies

In West Bengal the fishermen Co-operative societies are arranged in three tier system as follows:

- a. An Apex Federation at State Level called Benfish.
- b. Central Fishermen cooperative societies at District level
- c. Primary Fishermen cooperative societies at village level.

Fishermen co-operatives in west Bengal

West Bengal is the 2nd state in India, which formed fishermen cooperatives in 1918. Since then, a large number of fishermen co-operatives are formed in West Bengal involving about one lakh fishers who are mostly belong to socially, economically and educationally backward community.

The following table shows the number of fishermen co-operative societies (Inland and Ornamental) in West Bengal as on 31.03.2016*

Sl. No.	District	CFCS	PFCS Category			Total	Effective water area (in ha)	Total number of members
			A	B	C			
1	Darjeeling	0	1	0	2	3	3	400
2	Jalpaiguri	1	0	15	0	15	431	4000
3	Cooch Bihar	1	37	12	15	64	3414	14073
4	Uttar Dinajpur	1	0	0	22	22	134	5000
5	DakshinDinajpur	1	12	0	0	12	156	5796
6	Malda	1	75	13	5	93	3188	14671
7	Murshidabad	1	24	13	76	113	21425	19312
8	Nadia	1	39	31	27	97	7760	13056
9	Birbhum	1	11	3	24	38	619	814
10	Bardwan	1	22	8	28	58	222	4611
11	North 24 Parganas	1	44	14	14	72	1727	8526
12	South 24 Parganas	1	36	28	38	102	966	3512
13	Hooghly	1	15	7	14	36	202	2115
14	Howrah	1	13	0	0	13	121	738
15	Purulia	1	0	0	49	49	6527	5919
16	Bankura	2	4	6	11	21	43	2630
17	PurbaMedinipur	1	32	26	11	69	2070	2477
18	PaschimMedinipur	1	19	6	4	29	93	4997
	Total	18	384	182	340	906	49101	112647

*Source: Hand Book of Fisheries Statistics 2015-16, Govt. of WB.

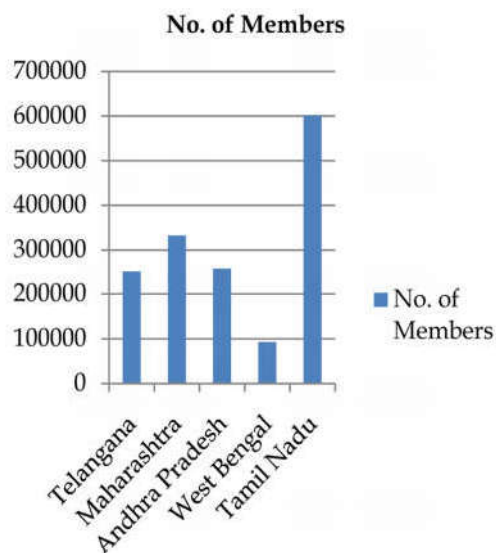
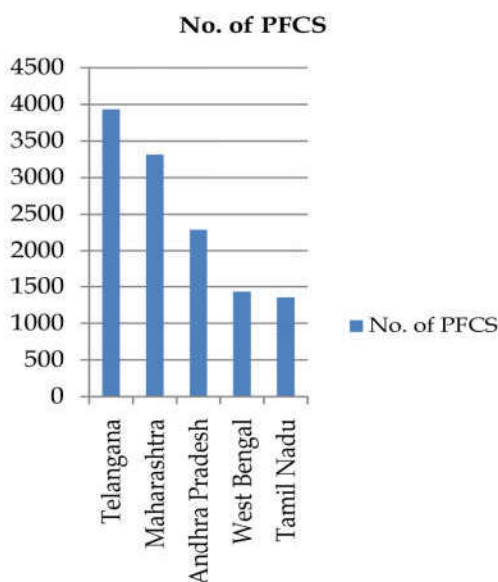
In Marine Sector Fishermen co-operative societies in West Bengal as on 31.03.2016 are as follows*

Sl. No.	District	CFCS	PFCS Category			Total	Effective water area (in ha)	Total number of members
			A	B	C			
1	South 24 Parganas	1	16	0	0	16	5730	
2	PurbaMedinipur	1	7	6	52	66	4135	
	Total	2	23	6	52	82	9865	

*Source: Hand Book of Fisheries Statistics 2015-16, Govt. of WB.

Comparative account of fishermen Co-operatives in West Bengal and other states of India

In India, there are over 18 thousand of functional primary fisheries co-operative societies having a membership of around 3 lakh fishers in the country. The data which found in the website of National level federation of fishermen co-operatives (FISHCOPFED) is somewhat different from the data found in Hand Book of Fisheries Statistics 2015-16, Govt. of WB. As per FISHCOPFED survey data, Telangana has highest number of fishermen cooperatives followed by Maharashtra. West Bengal occupies 4th rank as per the number of fishermen cooperatives in India, but the total number of members under the PFCS is very low in West Bengal in comparison to other states of the country. The graphical representation of Fishermen co-operatives of five leading states of India as per FISHCOPFED data, is given below-



Fishermen Cooperatives in Murshidabad District

Among the district wise impounded fresh water area, Murshidabad with 28,348ha, is the 3rd highest in West Bengal, after South 24 Parganas, with 49,237 ha & Burdwan with 31,180 ha. Number of rivers in the district is 14 covering total length of 912 km & number of canals -914 covering 2138 km. No. of water bodies in the district is (05 acre & above)-122 with the area of 7,751 ha. Total fish cultivable area in the district is 20,599 ha. In Murshidabad, number of fishing village is 109 where 21,673 families live. The total fisher folk population of the district is 3,53,174; most of whom belong to socially and economically backward scheduled caste category. This district has the highest number of fisher folk population in SC category in West Bengal

Murshidabad has highest number of primary fishermen co-operative societies (113) in west Bengal involving 19,312 members who are engaged in fish production covering an area of 21,425 ha. The number of water bodies with an area of 5 acre or above, under the control of PFCS in Murshidabad is 118 having the total water area of 7316.73 ha. The primary survey of the PFCS in the district reveals the following facts

1. Most of the co-operatives in the district are found in moribund condition with very low production.
2. All (12 No.) Ornamental fishery PFCS in the district are non-functional at present condition.
3. Three Co-operative Societies of the district namely, Bhakuri Matshyajibi Samaboy Samity, Agragami Beel Bishnupur F.C.S, Katiganga-Manindranagar F.C.S. are found in proper functioning condition out of the 113 PFCS in the district.
4. The system adopted by the PFCS for production of fish is mostly traditional catch of fish with old type fishing crafts and gear.
5. No PFCS is successful in production of fish seed by induced breeding process.
6. There is no system of cold storage run by the PFCS and total catch is daily sold in the local markets.
7. Most of the fishermen members are compelled to adopt other profession including daily wage labour or rickshaw puller as full mandays are not created in the PFCS throughout the year.
8. Effects of Anthropogenic pressure and Pollution, particularly due to untreated sewage have been observed in the water bodies managed by the PFCS.
9. Some fishers also complained of undesirable political intervention as the cause of malfunctioning of PFCS.

10. Lack of knowledge of modern aquaculture has been observed among the members.
11. One unit of cage culture has been constructed but no production has been made due to lack of appropriate knowledge.
12. It has also been found that PFCS are unable to participate in the auction of large water bodies due to lack of funds.

Conclusion

In West Bengal, fishery is a sunrise sector and many scopes are there for its improvement. Nearly one thousand primary fishermen cooperative societies with over one lakh fishermen as member can play vital role in production of fish and other economically important aquatic organisms. The facts revealed by the primary survey in Murshidabad district of West Bengal where highest number of fishermen Co-operatives exist, are highly frustrating in nature. So, there is a need to change the management policy of the PFCS to make the cooperatives more dynamic in culture and production of fish with advanced knowledge in this field. Education and training are also required to test the water and soil quality parameters, prevention of fish diseases and control of pollution. Undesirable political intervention need to be stopped in the functioning of PFCS. Increase in the access to credit facility is also required. There is a need to change the existing co-operative law to make the cooperatives most conducive to market driven economy. Participation of women in large number in the regular functioning of cooperatives may improve the gender inequality and quality of management of PFCS

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