

Governance Challenges for Fishing Activity in Ratnagiri Town

Background

Ratnagiri is located in western coast of Maharashtra called the Konkan region. There are five maritime districts in Maharashtra viz. Thane, Greater Mumbai, Raigad, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg from where the fishing vessels operate. At present there are 184 fish landing centres in the five maritime districts of Maharashtra.¹ However, there are only three harbours namely Sassoon Docks, New Ferry Wharf and Mirkarwada which have properly constructed permanent facilities for fish landings. The first two harbours are in the Greater Mumbai District under the direct control of the Mumbai Port Trust while the third one is in Ratnagiri District which has been constructed by the state fisheries department under the centrally sponsored scheme. The district of Ratnagiri is known for its long coast line and convenient harbours, together with its comparative nearness to the Arabian Coast. Ratnagiri district is one of the most important maritime districts of the State with the coastal belt extending to about 167 kms. Fishing industry in the district is mainly dependent upon the exploitation of marine resources.² The ichthyologic fauna of Ratnagiri district is very rich comprising a good number of varieties viz. prawns, sharks, skates, rays, mackerals, sardines, tuna, surmai, pomfret, karel, dagol and catfish. Prawn processing is carried out in a big scale which has a great demand abroad. Besides this, shell fisheries are also exploited in a number of creeks, backwaters, and estuaries along the coast. Fishing season commences from September and lasts till the end of May. During the monsoon season, fishing activity practically comes to a halt except in the creeks.³

Mirkarwada harbour in Ratnagiri town is a major fish landing and assembling centre of the Ratnagiri District whereas Rajiwada is the satellite landing centre in Ratnagiri town. The major fish landings of the Mirkarwada comprise Bombay duck, croakers, ribbonflshes, cat fishes, carangids, mackerel, pomfrets, penaeid and non-penaeid prawns and cephalopods.⁴ Mirkarwada fishery harbour has been constructed by the State Government under the centrally sponsored scheme at Ratnagiri. This is the only harbour taken up by the State Government with assistance from Government of India. The harbour at a cost of Rs. 344 lakhs was sanctioned by the Central Government of India in 1976 and the work commenced in 1977.⁵ Although the entire construction work of the harbour was to be completed within a period of four years from the date of sanction, the construction work was delayed on account of

1 Marine Census Report (2010), Central Marine Fisheries Research Centre, Cochin, India

2 Marine Fisheries Information Service (1998), Central Marine Fisheries Research Centre, Cochin, India

3 District Census Handbook, Ratangiri (1996), The Maharashtra Census Directorate, Mumbai

4 Information collected from Adarsh Machimar Society, Mirkarwada in March 2012.

5 For more details, see State Fisheries Department Website, Government of Maharashtra

various unforeseen difficulties. The important works like construction of break water walls, jetties, quays, slopping hard etc. were completed by 1987-'88, but ancillary works such as internal roads, water supply, leveling, drainage etc. are yet to be completed. Owing to delay in the works, the revised proposal with an estimated cost of over 1,800 lakhs has been submitted by the State Government of Maharashtra to the Central Government of India.⁶ Since the major works of this harbour were almost completed, the local fishermen have started making use of Mirkarwada harbour since 1988-'89. Presently, there are over 600 fishing vessels operating from this harbour and around 10,000 people's livelihood directly dependent on fishing activity.⁷

The major problem faced in the smooth running of this harbour is excessive silting.⁸ Recently, the State Department has approached the Dredging Corporation of India for exploring the possibility of undertaking dredging work. The estimated cost of dredging is likely to be around Rs. 200 lakhs.⁹ When the fish is caught in such large quantities and many fishing vessels operate regularly, it is imperative that landing and berthing facilities be developed. This becomes more significant because in addition to the safety of the vessels, facilities should also be there for adequate storage, transportation and hygienic handling.¹⁰ All these facilities are supposed to be provided by the fisheries harbours. In addition to this, there are a number of governance challenges for fishing activity in Ratnagiri which include: lack of implementation, presence of multiple authorities and lack of coordination among them, impact of CRZ notification, encroachment of common land by vested interests, apathy of town planning department, failure of state fisheries department and local municipal council in providing basic facilities and infrastructure, monopoly of trawlers and domination of powerful groups over fishing society.

This paper gives a detailed explanation of emerging governance challenges and key concerns that are unfolding in and around fishing activity in Ratnagiri Town of Maharashtra. This paper strongly argues that sustainable fishing activity requires a deterrent monitoring mechanism and a coordinated approach involving both government departments (starting from central to local government departments) and fishing societies in a democratic and transparent way. This research was carried out in Ratnagiri town of Maharashtra during September 2011-December 2012. The data collection was done through field survey and analysis of various government reports related to marine fisheries in Ratnagiri. A detailed documentation of Mirkarwada fishing area was conducted through personal visit, interaction with

6 Information obtained from Regional Fisheries Department Office, Ratnagiri

7 Information obtained from Adarsh Machimar Society, Mirkarwada, Ratnagiri

8 Information shared by the local fishing community members

9 Information shared by the Port Inspector, Ratnagiri

10 This is a major concern as expressed by local fishing community members.

fishing community members, discussion with different types of boat owners, owners of ice factory, manager of fish processing units, president and secretary of fishing society of Mirkarwada and local political representatives of Mirkarwada. Also, interview of State Fisheries Department functionaries, Ratnagiri Municipal Council Members, Urban Planning Department, Marine Fisheries Department functionaries, District Coastal Zone Authority Members of Ratnagiri, and Ratnagiri District Collector has been conducted to understand emerging trends and challenges for fishing activity in Ratnagiri town.

Socio-Economic Profile of Fishing Communities in Ratnagiri Town

The fisherfolk population in Ratnagiri town is around 10,000 living in three different settlements of Ratnagiri town such as Mirkarwada, Rajiwada and Bhatkarwada.¹¹ In these three areas there are about 600 fishing vessels of which mechanised 534 and non-mechanised are 66. Around 95% of fishing community members in Ratnagiri town belong to Muslim community. Most of the people engage in the activity for eight months. During four months of monsoon season fishing is prohibited and the workers attend to maintenance of their trawlers, boats, and net preparing during this season. Though there are three fishing community settlements, majority of them live in Mirkarwada. This study has done an in-depth survey of Mirkarwada which consists of seven lanes (what is known as saath mahalas in local area).

The fisher folk in Ratnagiri town mostly do marine fishing. As mentioned above, there are different types of boat owners. The traditional boats constructed out of the local timber are used along with a large number of mechanized, modern boats. Jetties and landing sites are provided with facilities for docking and unloading and transportation of fish. Though there are no government owned or sponsored Ice factories and cold storage facilities, in recent years, private players have started Ice factories and cold storage which have become important resources for fishermen.¹² Nylon nets and floats, and other materials are provided by modern industry.¹³ In recent years, the use of purse seine nets has, however, increased. Traditional fishing used sail boats while the contemporary boats use diesel as fuel for running the boats. The boats owners get subsidized diesel from the fishing society. Transportation

11 The fishing census of Maharashtra puts the figure as 5,620 but our interaction with all the fishing societies; we were told that this number has gone up to 10,000. At present, only members of these societies are around 6, 246 and total population is much more than what the fishing census projects.

12 At present, there are twelve ice factories and four cold storages in Ratnagiri Town.

13 Sustainable Cities Programme, Maharashtra-II, UN-Habitat-Government of Maharashtra-All India Local Self Government-Ratnagiri Municipal Council, 2004

network has also helped the activity in providing ice, water and also exporting fish to different parts of the country. Excess fish is dried on the reclaimed land of the sea by fisher women and sold in the market. However, the reclaimed land has not been authorised for fishing related activities. The Mahila Machimar Society has been providing transport facility for women fisher folk to sell fish in nearby villages.



Picture: Mirkarwada Fish Market

Fishing is still largely practiced by the traditional fisher folk communities and they have selectively adapted modern technology into their profession. Roughly 10,000 people are engaged in the fishing activity along the coast of Ratnagiri town. This activity has greatly expanded due to modern infrastructure such as cold storage, ice factories, fish processing plants, and transport network. Use of diesel has reduced the dependence of the fishermen on wind energy, and the speed of operation has increased along with the scale. Also, use of other modern technologies like fish finder technology, GPS, Mobile, and Wireless has helped them to expand their fishing activity and get them more revenue. Market has also expanded beyond the local market and export to other states and countries have gone up over the years. Fishing has expanded beyond the traditional boundaries and is now more driven by the market forces rather than traditional community regulations and social system of caste. Number of

seasonal migrant workers is high who work with the trawlers but no authentic data is available about their identity. Local people don't want to continue in this profession as wage is low and also this activity has been seen as painful as they need to work for 14 to 18 hours a day. Most of the activity is categorized in informal sector and incomes from the activity are not insignificant. Also, there is lack of basic facilities like health centre, toilet, water supply system, and housing near the harbour. In recent years, many workers come from Karnataka, Gujarat, Nepal and North East but it is observed that these workers are harassed by middlemen and boat owners in many ways and are not paid regularly. In addition to this, workers don't get license on time to go to sea; they are also harassed by patrolling police and customs staff.¹⁴

Traditionally the fishing is a community based activity carried out by Muslim community in Ratnagiri town. Present principles of organization are not much different and have evolved further with modern changes in the technology and infrastructures. Very few outsiders enter the profession as the choice is still limited by social conditions. There are no formal education facilities either to induce new people from outside the community or to train the traditional workers in modern day fishing sector of the economy, expansion of global market. Similarly, the community does not seem to be aware to environmental and market hazards involved in the sector and may not be aware of the hazards involved.¹⁵ The community as well as the government is not yet geared to make changes in traditional pattern, evolve it further for sustained development. Education in the field is very minimal and the use of modern technology is very selective and limited to operations. Especially the efficiency of design for conservation of diesel as fuel for boats, cold storage facilities and use of energy efficient methods of transportation are lacking. Information resources such as meteorological information, availability of fish through satellite imaging techniques, storm warning systems are largely lacking. Government schemes provide subsidy support for diesel, financial support to buy boats, cold storage and market development but its impact at the implementation level has not been effective. There is large scope for purposeful and useful intervention in the sector for long term sustainability of this activity and needs urgent attention. Participation of local city government in the activity is very minimal. Potential for such engagement is both necessary and useful for the city and the community.

14 Interview with workers engaged in fishing activity, Mirkarwada. This harassment by patrolling police and custom staff has increased after the 26/11 terrorist attack in Mumbai.

15 There is a training centre in Ratnagiri to educate the environmental implications of marine fishing and other issues related to fishing activity but not many people participate in the training programme. There are several reasons for this. Earlier, the training programme was free of cost and now the fishing community people have to pay a fee to take the training and also there is lack of resources in the training centre to give adequate knowledge in this filed.

Table 1: District Profile

District	Landing Centres	Fishing Villages	Fisherman Families	Traditional Fisherman Families	BPL Families	Fisherfolk Population
Thane	28	77	26,821	26,331	4,231	121,869
Greater Mumbai	18	30	9,304	9,138	624	40,953
Ratnagiri	36	98	14,064	12,541	2,089	66,685
Raigad	36	168	24,026	20,448	5,864	123,574
Sindhudurg	34	83	7,277	5,745	2,701	33,178
Total	152	456	81,492	74,203	15,509	386,259

Table 2: Fishing Craft in the Fishery

District	Trawlers	Gillnetters	Dolnetters	Lines	Purse Seiners	Others	Total Mechanised	Motorised	Non Motorised	Total
Thane	16	206	1,613	0	0	0	1,835	773	247	2,855
Greater Mumbai	2,849	551	1,236	5	228	26	4,895	0	830	5,725
Ratnagiri	2,015	620	31	0	142	3	2,811	49	796	3,656
Raigad	207	1,181	1,093	0	65	0	2,546	135	505	3,186
Sindhudurg	526	403	0	0	0	0	929	606	405	1,940
Total	5,613	2,961	3,973	5	435	29	13,016	1,563	2,783	17,362

Table 3: Fishing Craft in the Fishery

District	Landing Centres	Trawlers	Gillnetters	Dolnetters	Lines	Purse Seiners	Others	Total Mechanised	Motorised	Non Motorised	Total
Ratnagiri	Mirkarwada	330	7	0	0	110	0	447	30	16	493
	Rajiwada	60	27	0	0	0	0	87	5	15	107
Total		390	34	0	0	110	0	534	35	31	600

Table 4: Infrastructure-Fishery Related

District	Boat Yards	Ice Factorie s	Cold Storage s	Freezi ng Plants	Curi ng Yard s	Peeling Sheds	Processi ng Plants	Fish Meal Plants	Total
Thane	4	11	10	3	1	0	3	0	0
Greater Mumbai	0	4	11	36	9	9	34	9	9
Ratnagir i	0	18	4	4	0	0	4	6	0
Raigad	1	7	0	1	0	0	11	0	0
Sindhud urg	0	9	8	1	0	0	1	0	0
Total	5	49	33	45	10	9	53	15	9

Table 5: Fishermen Families in Different Settlements

Name of the Fishing Area in Ratnagiri Town	Fishermen Families	Traditional Fishermen Families	BPL Families	Fisherfolk Population
Mirkarwada	405	405	00	2340
Rajiwada	675	675	23	3004
Bhatkarwada	59	59	04	276
Total	1139	1139	27	5620

Table 6: Religion Background of Families involved in Fishing Activity in Ratnagiri Town

Mirkarwada: Hindu Families (1), Muslim (404)

Rajiwada: Hindu Families (4), Muslim (671)

Bhatkarwada: Hindu Families (0), Muslim (59)

Total: Hindu Families (5), Muslim (1,134)

Source: Marine Fisheries Census 2010, Maharashtra

Policy & Institutional Mechanisms: Role of State Fisheries Department

The Constitutions of India grants state governments responsibility for fisheries within territorial waters

which extend up to 12 nautical miles from shore.¹⁶ The Central Government, on the other hand, deals with all fishing activities which take place beyond this limit in the so-called deep sea.¹⁷ The state government of Maharashtra has strengthened its role over marine fisheries resources through the enactment of Maharashtra Marine Fish Regulations Act in 1981. The Maharashtra government has largely assigned the implementation of this act to the State Fisheries Department. Broadly speaking, the power of the State Fisheries Department under this Act include: power to regulate, restrict or prohibit certain fishing activities within specified area; prohibition of use of fishing vessels in contravention of any order made under section 4; licensing of fishing vessels; prohibition of using fishing vessels which are not licensed; cancellation, suspension and amendment of licenses; registration of vessels; information to be given to Registration Officer about movement of fishing vessel and his permission to be obtained; power to enter and search fishing vessel; disposal of seized fish; imposition of penalty and adjudication; constitution of Appellate Board and appeals to Appellate Board and Others.¹⁸

The other important policy to protect and improve marine fisheries is Comprehensive Marine Fishing Policy introduced by the Central Government of India in 2004. Realising that relevance of the Marine Fisheries Sector extends beyond the livelihood security of the large fisherfolk population to the food security of thousands of people in the country and generating foreign exchange for the country, the Ministry of Agricultural Department of Animal Husbandry Dairying drafted the Comprehensive Marine Fishing Policy in 2004. It was felt that the potential of the sector for employment generation through ancillary activities and empowerment of coastal womenfolk is significant. However, the Comprehensive Marine Fishing Policy in 2004 has pointed out that the global marine fisheries, especially the coastal sector, has been under constant threat in the recent years basically due to depleting resources, land and sea based pollution and upheaval in the climatic conditions.¹⁹ Concerns over this in the international fora have given rise to conventions and procedures that are to be sincerely implemented by the Governments and meticulously practiced by the stakeholders so as to ensure sustainability in fisheries. The effort of the Union Government in this regard has resulted in introducing the Comprehensive Marine Fishing Policy document which seeks a focused endeavour from the coastal States and the Central Departments with full appreciation of the international conventions in force for conservation, management and sustainable utilization of our invaluable marine wealth, without losing

16 See Article 246 and Item 21 in the State List (list 2) of the 7th Schedule to the Constitution.

17 See Deep Sea Policy of Government of India, New Delhi

18 For more details, See Maharashtra Marine Fish Regulations Act 1981, Government of Maharashtra

19 [Comprehensive Marine Fishing Policy, 2004, Ministry of Agricultural Department of Animal Husbandry Dairying, Government of India, New Delhi](#)

its relevance to the food and livelihood security of the coastal communities which totally depend on this.

The marine fishing policy announced by the Government of India in the past focused only on the developmental needs of the deep-sea sector, leaving aside similar issues pertaining to the coastal sector to the respective marine states/ UT's.²⁰ Even though substantial assistance was channelised through Central and Centrally Sponsored Schemes in to the States/ UT's for the development of coastal fisheries, non-existence of an integrated policy for this sector was found to hamper fulfillment of the national objectives. Therefore, in the present policy the Government seeks to bring the traditional and coastal fishermen also in to the focus together with stakeholders in the deep-sea sector so as to achieve harmonized development of marine fishery both in the territorial and extra territorial waters of our country. The key objectives of Comprehensive Marine Fishing Policy, 2004 are: (1) to augment marine fish production of the country up to the sustainable level in a responsible manner so as to boost export of sea food from the country and also to increase per capita fish protein intake of the masses, (2) to ensure socio-economic security of the artisanal fishermen whose livelihood solely depends on this vocation, and (3) to ensure sustainable development of marine fisheries with due concern for ecological integrity and bio-diversity.²¹

20 For more details, see Deep Sea Fishing Policy like creating Exclusive Economic Zone in 1976 of [Ministry of Agricultural](#)

[Department of Animal Husbandry Dairying, Government of India, New Delhi](#)

21 [Comprehensive Marine Fishing Policy, 2004, Ministry of Agricultural Department of Animal Husbandry Dairying, Government of India, New Delhi, p.5](#)



Picture: Land silting problem in Mirkarwada Harbour, Ratnagiri

There has been a series of demands by the fishing community before the state fisheries department including: to reserve space for fish auction and packing hall so as to enable the landed catch to sort out under hygienic conditions and for auction under shelter so as to ensure deterioration of fish. Infrastructure facilities like boat repairing centre, diesel pump, toilets, water supply system, arrangement for supply of ice, market for local sale, cold storage system and other requirements for fishing activity have not been provided nearer to Mirkarwada harbour.

Role of Municipal Council of Ratnagiri

Ratnagiri town has developed as an administrative centre ever since it was declared the district headquarters and later on as a Municipal Council during the British rule. In addition to fishing activity, the town has been centre of trade and commerce activity ever since the Konkan railway line was constructed. Up to the 1960s there was substantial movement of passenger traffic on the Goa-Mumbai route on which Ratnagiri was a port. Though the town did not have an all weather port the water transport flourished as it was very cheap compared to road transport. Later on industrial development

took place around the town with the establishment of large industries such as Finolex, Narmada Cement, JK Files and Bharati Shipyard which required support from the Municipal Council for basic infrastructure of the town and also put pressure on the land use pattern of the town.²² The municipal council is required to plan for the physical development of the town. The Development Plan for the town has been revised and has been partly approved in 1996 and the remaining part is still to be approved by the State Government. The municipal council is entrusted with the implementation of the development plan. It prepares rules and regulations for city development, governance, oversees its implementation and directs the management of the town. However, the council has no expertise in the town planning hence is assisted by the state government's town planning department.

Under the 74th Amendment of the Indian Constitution, the local municipal council is an important institution to work towards the socio-economic development of the town. Given fishing activity as one of the major economic activities of the town, the role of local municipal council to sustain and strengthen this important economic activity and development of people dependent upon fishing activity, however, seems to be inadequate. An analysis of policy decisions of Ratnagiri Municipal Council (RMC) illustrates how the local institution has failed to recognize the importance of fishing activity as a major economic activity of the town. For example: though the Ratnagiri Municipal Council reserved lands for fishing and light industries, over the years there has been an attempt to convert and denotify these lands for residential and other commercial purposes. Also, the local municipal council has not provided the required infrastructure to these areas so as to enable the industries to function in an effective way. It is also observed that the fish marketing system in Ratnagiri town is highly unorganized and the local municipal council has not been consistent and serious to make interventions to strengthen this economic activity or provide any incentive to encourage this activity in the town.²³ For example: Naik fish processing unit is one of the biggest players in Ratnagiri. There are 5 Naik factories out of which 4 are running. These factories started in 1992 in the light and fish industrial zone as notified by the Ratnagiri Municipal Council. These companies do a range of activities starting from ice factory to exporting fish meat to Japan, Thailand and Korea. These factories require 30,000 litres freshwater per day but local municipal council is not able to provide adequate water to these companies.²⁴

22 Sustainable Cities Programme, Maharashtra-II, UN-Habitat-Government of Maharashtra-All India Local Self Government-Ratnagiri Municipal Council, 2003

23 Information shared by the ice factory owners, and fish processing unit managers

24 Interview with Naik Processing Unit Manager, Ratanagiri

It is also observed that fishing activity in the town has been seen as an occupation of a particular community i.e, Muslim Community, who lives in the extreme end of the town near to sea and their fishing activities have been seen by other communities in the town as filthy and therefore no space for them in the heart of the town. This perception of people has also been reflecting in the approach of local policy-makers as the basic services like collection of solid waste, water supply system, road repair, redevelopment of municipal school, street lights and drainage system have not been given adequate importance in the Mirkarwada fishing village area as it has been in other parts of the town.²⁵ Basic facility for fish market has been demanded but no effort has been made by RMC. There are schemes from the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDF) with 100 % assistance for these services but no initiative has been taken by the Ratnagiri Municipal Council to avail these schemes. Local councilors representing Mirkarwada area have also shown no interest in strengthening fishing activity and demanding basic facilities for fishing community people.

Fishing Activities and CRZ Constraints

The land use pattern in Ratnagiri Town has been subject to many constraints. The total area of Ratnagiri Town is 8.5 sq. km. Around 33% of Ratnagiri Town comes under CRZ II which prohibits any development activity in this area and in the remaining land; there is hardly any space available for any new development activity including space for fishing activity. There are many proposals for redevelopment of the town but due to CRZ regulations and political constraints, many of the proposed plans have not been implemented. For example: the reclaimed land from sea has not been developed due to CRZ regulation. Though the Mirkarwada Harbour redevelopment plan has been proposed and approved by the state fisheries department, the Central Government has not taken any decision for the last ten years.²⁶ Whereas around 100 acres of the reclaimed land has been given to Coast Guard department by the District Collector without any discussion with traditional fishing community people. No effort has been made to discuss and plan how to use and manage the remained reclaimed land from sea.²⁷ In this connection, it is important to mention that while the revised CRZ notification of 2011 specifically emphasises to ensure livelihood security to the fishing communities and other local communities living in the coastal areas, there has not been any concerted effort neither by the coastal zone management authority nor by any other implementing agencies to work towards this objective. On the other hand, it has been observed that the reclaimed land is grabbed by local powerful fisherman groups who don't allow others to come and carry out any fishing related activities. In some cases, it has

25 Information obtained from fishing community people in Mirkarwada and also observed during field survey.

26 Information obtained from discussion with State Fisheries Regional Office, Ratnagiri

27 Interview with Adarsh Machimar Fishing Society, Secretary, Mirkarwada

been observed that these powerful groups have not only forcefully grabbed these reclaimed lands but have also given rent these places to the marginalized and less powerful traditional boat owners and people engaged in allied fishing activities. Similarly, there is also illegal construction of buildings and hotel industries in coastal areas which has been overlooked by the state administration. The 1991 CRZ Notification sought to regulate all developmental activities in the inter-tidal area and within 500 metres on the landward side. No concrete steps were taken in Ratnagiri town by local administration and other regulatory bodies like pollution control board with regard to the pollution emanating from land based activities. Also, the state pollution control board failed to control the discharge of untreated sewage by the local municipal council, effluents and the disposal of solid wastes as such activities endanger the fish and their ecosystem. As a result, untreated effluents were discharged into the seashore causing decline of fish catch near the sea shore and thereby affecting traditional fisherman.



Picture: Discharge of Industrial Effluents to Seashore

Economic Aggression

With the introduction of mechanised boats and the increasing expansion of their activities, it is only expected that in coming years the pressure of fishing activity in the Mirkarwada Harbour will increase. The overexploitation of coastal resources by these new entrants without any concern for artisanal fishing communities needs to be regulated in an effective manner. Further during the last two decades almost all fishermen in Mirkarwada have shifted from gill net to nylon nets or purse seine nets, and the quantum of fishing nets and mechanised boats have increased significantly.²⁸ Given the current state of affairs, the coastal areas should have been monitored carefully by the state fisheries department and against the overexploitation of coastal resources protective action should have been taken to ensure that even at the risk of some short-term loss, the longer term sustainable yield should not suffer. Based on our survey, it is found that the state fisheries department has not responded by taking adequate protective steps to maintain the longer-term sustainable yield. Notwithstanding the threat of possible overfishing by the mechanised boats, the state fisheries department has allowed and even encouraged a large number of new operators to fish in the Mirkarwada coastal areas.

28 Interview with President of Adarsh Machimar Society, Mirkarwada



Picture: Use of Purse Seine Net in Ratnagiri

These new operators have been allowed to use highly mechanised and destructive fishing methods such as trawling (the method of scraping the sea bottom with a bell shaped net to catch demersal fish) and purse seining (the method of quickly encircling whole shoals of pelagic fish). This is going to threaten the ecology of the coastal areas and the sustainable yield of fisheries. A series of conflicts around fishing activity has emerged along the Mirkarwada Harbour of Ratnagiri town since the early 1990s. One major and serious concern has been the impact of modern mechanised trawlers on artisanal fishermen. Conflicts between the two arise mainly because the fish catch targeted by mechanised fishermen abound in the same waters upon which the artisanal communities depend. The Adarash Machimar Society instead of protecting the rights of traditional fisherfolk against the mechanised boats to catch fish in inshore water has supported the mechanised boat owners and every effort has been made to protect their rights and concerns and even encouraged the new operators to buy mechanised boats and use purse seine nets. The use of mechanized boats for fishing activity in Mirkarwada has witnessed a phenomenal growth during the last three decades. It is also observed that intensive fishing

by the mechanized sector and indiscriminate fishing of juveniles has attained serious proportions. This has led to promulgation of fishing regulatory measures by most of the maritime states through closure of fishing during certain seasons. However, there is no effective implementation of this act. The Marine Fishing Regulation Act of Maharashtra also prohibits trawling during the monsoon season which helps to provide some relief to the overfished areas but this by itself could only be a very inadequate measure. No serious effort has made neither by the state fisheries department nor by the fishing societies to monitor the ban of fishing activity during monsoon season.

Monopolistic Fishing Societies

There are six fishing societies in Ratnagiri Town namely, Adarsh Machimar Society, Mirkarwad, Rajiwada Machimar Society, Rajiwada, Bhagwati Bandar Machimar Society, Bhagwati Bandar, Mahila Machimar Society, Mirkarwada, Mahila Machimar Society, Rajiwada and Mahila Machimar Society in Bhagwati Bandar. These fishing societies play the role of facilitator between fishing community people and various state departments, especially the state fisheries department. Any person can become a member of fishing society if he or she is traditionally engaged in fishing activity. All the members are entitled to get government subsidies and welfare schemes made for the protection and improvement of fishing community through the fishing society. These societies facilitate their members in getting license for fish catching, loan to buy boat and net, diesel subsidies, raw materials related to fishing activity and any government schemes for the development of fishing community.



Picture: Discussion with Karla Machimar Society Members

Though in 1979, there was only one fishing society i.e, Adarsh Machimar Society, Mirkarwada, at present there are six and many more are going to come in coming years. One of the reasons for the increasing number of fishing societies is centralization of power and decision-making of fishing society by a few rich trawlers and politically affiliated members in the society. It has been observed that the fishing society has not been working for the common and traditional fishing community members. It has been monopolized by a group of people who have been actively diverting resources and making decisions for their benefits.²⁹ Many members have accused that the Adarsh Fishing Society in Mirkarwada is not democratic and transparent as it has been controlled and managed by a few powerful and politically affiliated members of the Mirkarwada area. There is hardly any scope for addressing the problems of traditional boat owners, who have been facing a major challenge from mechanized boat owners. Traditional boat owner in Mirkarwada has not got any scheme benefit and government subsidy policy measures like loan to buy or repair his traditional boat or to buy a net. Many traditional boat owners have given up their full time fishing activity as they are not getting any support from these societies. While some of them prefer to work in net preparing, daily wage workers in local ice-factory

29 Interview with Mr. Faqir Mohammad Hodekar, Traditional Boat Owner, Mirkarwada

and cold storage factories, in recent years, most people from Mirkarwada are migrating into Saudi Arabia or to Mumbai for better job prospectus.

Multiple Authorities

Perhaps the most important and crucial governance challenge for fishing activity in Ratnagiri town has been the presence of multiple authorities without any coordination. As mentioned above, the nodal agency for marine fishing regulation has been the state fisheries department of Maharashtra. But, over the years, with the enactment of a number of economic (like creation of port) and environmental policies (like CRZ notification), a number of agencies has been involved in the implementation process at the grass roots level.



Picture: Revised Harbour Plan for Mirkarwada, Ratnagiri

The agencies which are involved include: Coastal Regulation Zone Authority, Pollution Control Board, District Development Officer, Port Authority, Harbour Engineer Department, Customs Office, State Fisheries Department, Local Municipal Council, Town Planning Department, District Collector Office and Police Department. Though all agencies are not directly related to fishing activity, the power enshrined to each authority without any institutional mechanism to coordinate the among these

agencies, however, creates a number of confusions and delays in the implementation of policies related to fishing activity. For example: the reclaimed land has not been allotted for fishing activity because every department claims for it and there is no involvement of fishing societies to discuss about it. In fact, the coast guard department has already been allotted 100 acres of reclaimed land but no authorization of reclaimed land for fishing activity has been made because it will violate CRZ notification. There are also proposals to divert more reclaimed land for non-fishing activity. The infrastructure facilities for fishing activities are not effectively implemented because the plan is proposed by state fisheries department without involving departments like port authority and harbour engineer department who are going to implement the plan at the grass roots level.

Issues need to be resolved

The concerned authorities, in this case, the state fisheries department and district collector officer and coastal authority need to urgently resolve issues still hindering fishing related activity in the reclaimed land, particularly occupied by fishing community for various activities like cold storage, fish drying, cutting, supplying and selling in the local market. The reclaimed land should be used for common interests of fishing community and rights to use the reclaimed land should remain vested with the local fishing community. Titles to reclaimed land should be given to local fishing community so that their livelihood and other economic activities related to fishing sector can be protected. Basic amenities like water, sanitation and health facilities should be provided near the Mirkarwada jetty side. It is important to ensure that the access to basic services is available so that the fishing community can avail these services and their right to life can be protected. It is important to involve local fishing community in the redevelopment/reconstruction of the Mirkarwada Port so that their requirements can be taken care of. Also, it is important to ensure the process of redevelopment is democratic and transparent. No doubt, the state fisheries department and NCDC have been very useful to protect and improve the interests of fishing community across the state of Maharashtra but these institutions should adopt a broader development approach, and should aim to improve the quality of life and livelihood of fishing communities in a sustained manner. The interventions of these institutions should not be piecemeal and inconsistent. Most importantly, the local municipal council should ensure basic facilities for fishing activity in the town, including incentive for fishing industries and market space for fishing activity so that it can enhance the economic activity of the town.

Another issue that needs adequate attention is the role of state fisheries department in educating and creating awareness among fishing communities and societies about the impact of carrying out fishing

activity during monsoon period. The government should put in place adequate mechanism to monitor that no fishing activity takes place during prohibition period. In this connection, the role of fishing society is also very crucial to educate its members about the negative impact of fishing activity during the prohibition period. Also, a coherent and effective strategy/mechanism in collaboration with local fishing society should be developed so that fishing activities during monsoon period can be stopped. Efforts should be made to improve understanding about the possible impact of the indiscriminate use of pursue seine net and trawlers on fishery resources and coastal ecosystem.

The district coastal zone management committee has hardly shown any interest in the protection and restoration of coastal habitats and biodiversity on a priority basis in Ratnagiri.³⁰ The district coastal zone management committee needs to meet regularly and assess the impact of various activities in coastal areas and suggest measures that can balance the interests of various groups. Any decisions related to fishing community and coastal land by the district coastal zone management committee should be made in a democratic way, and should not lead to alienation of fishing communities from coastal lands.

³⁰ The district coastal zone management committee was constituted in 2011 but has met only once. The first meeting was more about to know each other than any constructive discussion about the coastal issues.



Picture: Reclaimed Land in Ratanagiri Town

The Mahila Machimar Society has been established to protect the rights of women fishing communities but these societies need to be supported and recognised by the state fisheries department in a consistent manner. Women of fishing communities engaged in fishing operations such as fishing, cutting, washing, salting, segregation, drying, selling in the market should be supported and recognised as workers in their own right. Specific policy needs to be tailored to meet their requirements and should aim to improve women's livelihood, condition of work, access to resources and social security.

The fishing activity also needs modern technology, training of human resources which is completely lacking at present for effective management of available resources, expansion of resources. Most fishermen are trained in traditional manner by the family but they may not have necessary environmental management awareness and skills demanded for sustenance of the activity. No doubt, the state fisheries department provides training to fishing community but the quality of training and

opportunities for skill development should be enhanced to enable diversification of the livelihood options of fishing communities.³¹ In this connection, the state fisheries department can also involve local fisheries college to undertake regular training programme for fishing communities. The environmental hazards can snowball into economic shock if they flout natural resource's boundary (which is witnessed at many other places in the world). The fishing sector of the economy is very important but is rather informal and unregulated and needs sustainable approach than what it is today. The space for fish market with adequate infrastructure support system and planning are important to sustain this activity.

The demands for rights and other livelihood concerns by the fishing societies, any democracy assumes, has to be accompanied by responsibility. While making claims for the right to the fish resources, the fishing societies in Mirkarwarda that speaks on behalf of the traditional fish workers, has also the responsibility to safeguard these resources that are a common heritage of society at large. Mr. Faqir Mohammad Hodekar, a member of the society, says that the fishing societies in Ratnagiri town need to be transparent and pro-poor people, which hitherto has been monopolised by vested interests and not interested in long-term interests of fishing community. Further, the fishing societies do not have regular interaction with fishing communities about their rights and problems faced by them regularly from various stakeholders. As of now, the functions of fishing societies in Ratnagiri are exclusively related to selling diesel and other raw materials related to fishing activities.

The demands to ban trawlers and purse seine net have been made again and again but no efforts have been made by the state government to prohibit the use of purse seine in an indiscriminate manner. It shows that the state certainly does not have the political will to implement its own decisions and gives all possible excuses to nullify its own policies prohibiting the use of purse seine net. This has become a greater uphill task in this era of globalisation and liberalisation and with the Indian state well entrenched in this logic, the fishing communities, especially the poor and traditional boat owners whose livelihood revolve around fishing activities will have a tremendous battle to fight for their survival. The traditional fishing communities like any other disadvantaged groups of the society has either been sidelined or marginalised in the coastal resource management in Ratnagiri town.

31 Interview with regional training officer, Ratnagiri. The regional training office in Ratnagiri lacks both human and technical resource. At present, there is only one training officer who has to carry out six-month training programme for the whole Ratnagiri district.