CHAPTER 8

MAJOR FISHERY ISSUES AND SHIFTING POLICY PARADIGMS

Development of fishery has been an abiding concern of the government at the state and central levels. In the Kerala fisheries the role and perspective of Government in fishery development were ingrained in the laws formulated in this regard. Fishing is a traditional activity of coastal people since time immemorial. Since fishery operations were in its pristine forms and was undertaken by people of poor means as their life style, the conventions evolved over the years could regulate the continuity of the operations in this sector obviating government regulations.

The British Parliament had passed Indian Fisheries Act - 1897 (Act IV of 1897) to regulate the fishing activity in British India. Later, the Cochin Fisheries Act 1092 M.E. (1917) and The Travancore Fisheries Act - 1097 M.E. (1922) were formulated specifically for development of fishery in Cochin and Travancore area. Similarly, in the Malabar Province Indian Fisheries (Madras Amendment) Act 1927 was also implemented. In 1949, after the unification of Travancore and Cochin to form the Travancore - Cochin State, the Travancore - Cochin Fisheries Act came into vogue.

Since independence, the realm of legislative approach to development issues became more concrete and participatory. Article 246 of the Constitution has provided the right to formulate laws in the territorial and inland waters and the right to initiate development of fishery to the state governments (Srivastava, et. al., 1991). This has given possibilities for more involvement in fishery development by
state governments. The Union Government, in turn, was responsible for the development of fisheries beyond territorial waters and for maritime research works.

The laws in force prior to 1950 were oriented, inter alia, to achieve sustainable and gradual development of the fishery and protecting the interest of the real producers\(^1\). The basic premise of fisheries developments plans in the Travancore region thus hinged on the judicious exploitation of marine resources by effectively and gradually raising the productive capabilities of the existing facilities giving primacy to the accumulated skills of fishermen (Kurien, 1985). There were explicit regulations giving power to the state to control the size, type and number of crafts and gears and also prohibit fishing in part or full during peculiar situations Indian Fisheries (Madras Fishing Amendment) Act - 1927. Stipulations were also there even to invoke licensing system in the matter of fishing process (Travancore - Cochin Fisheries Act - 1950).

Development activities in the fisheries underwent a dramatic change since the inception of the Five Year Plans. Under the euphoria of planned development, all traditionally evolved concepts, formulations and equilibiriums were replaced by western paradigms of development. The official view echoed in the National Planning Committee regarding fisheries sector as an occupation "largely of a primitive character carried on by ignorant, unorganised and ill equipped fishermen. Their techniques are rudimentary, their tackle elementary, their capital equipment slight and inefficient"(Shah, 1948). This perception gave way to initiate modernisation of fishing sector on new lines. The method resorted to under this modernisation was the superimposition of capitalist technology,
foreign expertise and forging a link with foreign markets. Besides, this perception has led to the creation of a fishery bureaucracy and a string of scientific and research institutions to form the basis for modernisation of the sector. These strategies expected to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the artisanal fishermen. The inconsistency and contradictions of this policy which culminated in uprooting the artisanal fishermen is discussed elsewhere. The capitalist forces unleashed under the western concepts of modernisation undermined the otherwise strategic path of development such as co-operatives. Even though, there was a good legacy of co-operative efforts to ameliorate the economic lot of the fishermen, this institution was the first casualty of the modernised approach of development in fishery. The confidence of the authorities in the modernisation process was such that the market principles would be taken care of the whole issues, and they just ignored the importance of co-operative endeavours in the fishermen development. However, the inconsistencies and contradictions caused by the modernisation process in the artisanal sector necessitated some policy changes and subsequently some patch up measures were introduced. There were no scope for much flexibility of policies under the given situation and hence looked upon the co-operative approaches once again. Thus the co-operatives as a strategy of development in fishery which was ignored completely under the First Five Year Plan was given importance in the Second Five Year Plan. In 1958-59 the State Government initiated steps for organisation of a three tier system of fishery co-operatives. Still the assumption was that once the co-operatives were established, productive equipments could be given to them to augment their productive capacity which in turn will result in creation of incessant surplus capable of transforming the entire artisanal fishery into modern (capitalist) sector.
It is obvious that such adhoc measures could not succeed\(^5\). At the policy level this adhocism failed because of:

1. only meagre provisions were given in organising co-operative units. Out of the total State Plan funds of Rs.31.51 crores invested in the fisheries sector upto 1979 - 80 the expenditure incurred on fishery co-operatives were only Rs.2.39 crores (7.6 per cent). The planwise break up is shown in table 8.1.

**Table 8.1 : Planwise Breakup of Expenditure Incurred on Fisheries Co-operatives. (Rs. lakhs)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan period</th>
<th>Total state expenditure on fisheries</th>
<th>Expenditure on fishermen co-operatives</th>
<th>Percentage of expenditure on co-operatives of the total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951-56</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956-61</td>
<td>60.52</td>
<td>6.85</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-66</td>
<td>343.24</td>
<td>11.05</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-69</td>
<td>749.33</td>
<td>25.38</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969-74</td>
<td>563.38</td>
<td>54.34</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-78</td>
<td>782.96</td>
<td>85.75</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978-79</td>
<td>279.69</td>
<td>37.62</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-80</td>
<td>369.21</td>
<td>17.56</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3151.01</td>
<td>238.55</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Department of fisheries, (1986)*

2. the institutional set up in the modern sector which was capitalistic in nature (credit, marketing, productive efficiency) put the traditional fishermen at a disadvantageous position vis-a-vis the modern sector and at this competitive level, the co-operative endeavours in the fishing sector could not be a viable
The development efforts under the Five Year Plans allocated more funds to help the capitalist forces. 

3. further, the increasing role of merchants/middlemen under the capitalist development process resulted in confiscating all benefits of the real fishermen.

Another policy which the Government favoured was an export boost of the fishery products. Under this policy fishery development was equated with development of trawling. Government loans and subsidies and bank credit were channelled to raise export markets of fish products. Almost the entire plan investment was for development of trawling and infrastructure support for it. Here again, the underlying expectation was that export earnings would facilitate the socio-economic upliftment of the fishermen.

The burden of the misdirected policies which culminated in the severe deprivation of the artisanal fishermen induced them to collectively air their grievances. The artisanal fishermen, whose knowledge of fisheries extends to centuries of experiences and observations through generations, diagnosed that the basic maladies afflicting in the fishery sector was the outcome of lopsided development approaches and strategies pursued under modernisation attempt. They collectively articulated the problems of fishery and demanded for:

(1) conservation of living resources in the coastal sea,

(2) regulation of indiscriminate fishing by mechanised boats, and

(3) protection of artisanal units from the onslaught of the modern sector.
Also, direct action of fishermen described above was to ensure their rightful place in the formulation and implementation of fishery development. By and large, the demands of artisanal fishermen reflected the crisis in the fishery sector, it just not ceased as a problem of fishermen alone. The lopsided development of the fishery and the isolation of fishermen from the development efforts and, moreover, the inseparable link between the fishermen and the sea invited the attention of social activists, thinkers and voluntary organisations (Kurien, 1988). All these agencies showed their solidarity for the cause of fishermen through extensive studies, seminars and writings. All these have resulted in identifying various issues as pertinent problems facing fishery which require immediate intervention by the Government. The major fishery issues which required immediate intervention by the Government were:

1. over exploitation of coastal fisheries necessitating imminent conservation and management of fishery resources.

2. protection of artisanal sector, ensuring a fair share of the resources.

3. optimisation of the size and power of the fishing units in the artisanal sector for operation within the inshore sea to avoid excess capacity and over investment in the artisanal sector.

4. periodical assessment of resources and drafting of appropriate fishing programme to suit the resource capabilities.

5. enactment of laws to provide the right of first sale to the primary producers to save them from exploitation by auctioneers and middlemen.
6. inducement to fishermen for offshore fishing with viable technology.

7. provision of liberalised and adequate organised credit.

8. provision of adequate supply of spares of engine and service facilities.

9. identification of forward and backward linkages in the fishing process to augment employment opportunities to the fisher folk.

10. indiscriminate construction of fishing harbours to meet the demand of mechanised boats at unrealistic projections.

11. over exploitation of deep sea resources by multinational companies endangering the resources in the inshore sea affecting artisanal fishermen.

The mounting pressure of the fishermen and the society at large up on the Government on identification of specific issues necessitated the Government to be empathetic with the fishermen cause. The Government realised the pitfalls of the policies pursued in fishery and began to contemplate on new strategies and policies that could accommodate the interest of the real producers. The Government started a multi-pronged strategy to deal with the situation.

The Government swung into action by enacting certain legislative measures. The Kerala Marine Fishing Regulation Act (1980) provided for regulation of fishing by the mechanised boats, registration and licensing of all boats and demarcation of the coastal waters (upto 30 metres south of Quilon and 20 metres depth north of it) for the exclusive use of artisanal fishing craft. The underlying objective of the law was conservation of marine fishery resources.
Another piece of legislation which the Government brought forth was The Kerala Fishermen Welfare Funds Act (1985). This is intended to usher in new vistas of funding support to fishermen’s welfare measures such as health cover, marriage and death ceremonies, old age care, short term credit for consumer expenditure and education.

In the meantime Government also appointed some committees to augment its own information base regarding fisheries. The Kalawar Committee (1984) whose assigned task was to examine the impact of trawling during the monsoon season on shrimp resources and particularly its impact on the traditional sector, among other things, pointed out the necessity of restricting the operations of the mechanised sector to augment the productive capacity of the artisanal fishery.

Armed with the legislative powers and the information base, the Government initiated a number of conservation, regulatory and welfare measures. The government pursued rigorously certain programmes favourable to artisanal sector. The Government’s earnestness to favour artisanal sector was reflected in the Seventh Five Year Plan outlay set apart for artisanal fishery development. Out of the total outlay of Rs.40 crores, about Rs.15 crores was set apart exclusively for artisanal fishing as against Rs. 0.60 crore in the Sixth Plan. A major portion of this outlay was used to supply motorised crafts, FRP boats, beach landing crafts and selected gear. An elaborate programme was also visualised for improving the infrastructure facilities for primary marketing of fish to ensure better prices for their catch and liberating them from the claws of the middlemen.
Further, the Government was saved of the trouble by finding alternatives strategies to suit the artisanal sector as have already articulated their preference of the system for conservation and augmentation of resources base and raising harvesting capacity through motorising country crafts\(^8\). The Government simply need to clinch this opportunity centralising all their efforts in this line. It was also increasingly felt that there could be a nodal agency to co-ordinate the development activities in the artisanal sector. Bitter experience with the co-operative movements to improve the economic condition of the artisanal fishermen made to accept the recommendation of the Resuscitative Committee on Fishery Co-operatives\(^9\) to formulate Fishermen Welfare Societies. The society will function as the central agency for supplying all inputs for fishermen, implement village level programmes for the promotion of all round socio-economic uplift of the community. Besides, it will be the grass root level agency for planning and plan implementation in the fishery sector.

At the district level, District Co-operative Societies and an apex body, viz, Kerala State Co-operative Federation for Fisheries Development at the state level have been formulated for better co-ordination and functioning of the primary organisations.

A prime conservation measure adopted by the government was the ban of trawling. Even though the government had the recommendations of two earlier committees, it constituted a third expert committee to re-examine the question of ban on monsoon trawling\(^10\). This committee submitted its report to the government in June 1989 which had recommended imposing trawling ban for three months. Following this recommendation, the government has imposed for the
first time a total monsoon trawling ban from mid July to the end of August. Thereafter, the trawling ban became a permanent fishery management practice in Kerala fishery. This will be evident from table 8.1.

Table 8.2: Number of Days of Trawling Ban During 1988-96

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Number of days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>June 29 - August 31</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>July 20 - August 31</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>June 28 - July 21</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>July 15 - August 16</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>June 21 - August 3</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>June 15 - July 15</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>June 15 - July 29</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>June 10 - July 20</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>June 15 - July 25</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>June 15 - July 29</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>June 15 - July 29</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The effect of trawling ban on conservation of resources is an unsettled issue. However, in 1990, the government constituted an inter-disciplinary study team to assess the impact of monsoon trawling ban. The team found that the fish harvest in 1989 was a record level of 6,40,000 tons, 170,000 tons above the 1988 level. In 1988 itself when there was partial ban, the fish harvest for the year was up by over 80,000 tons of the 1987 level. Considering the fact that fish resources are influenced by a multiplicity of factors, it may be difficult to quantify the effect of ban on conservation of these resources. However, having well settled the fact that trawling process amounts to ecological destruction, a ban would do good for fishery resources and in particular the artisanal fishery.
The declaration of the fisheries policy in 1994 was a milestone in the fishery development of the state. The policy of 1994 is significant that the government has understood the real causes of the fishery crisis in Kerala and recognises the need for certain fundamental principles of growth that should be pursued in a Third World economy like India. The policy statement in its preface remarked that the present state of affairs in the fisheries was due to the lack of well defined declared state policy. Further, it has pointed out that a socio-economic dichotomy has set in to the sector.

The basic premises of the Fisheries Development and Management Policy Statement emerged from the realisation that the modernisation process rooted in high technology, capital intensity and foreign markets could not succeed in giving an improved standard of living to the fishermen. The policy further reckons that modernisation only divided the sector into the polarised classes of haves and have nots. The inappropriate modernisation process has caused, apart from this socio-economic changes, a fall in productive efficiency on account of a stagnant production on the one hand and increased in production expenses on the other. While these effects are pointers at the results of an irrational use of scarce resources of the marine economy, it also undermined the end purpose of the functioning of this sector by depriving low cost protein to the society at large (due to excess importance given to export). It is to be noted with relief that the policy gives due importance to traditionally evolved knowledge base and remorsefully accepts that the indifference shown to traditional paradigms had aided and abetted polarisation of fishery sector.
Based on these premises, the New Fishery Policy envisaged a set of goals to recover the lost dynamics of the fishery sector. The important goals set out in the policy are (Govt. of Kerala, 1993).

1. Sustainable development of fishery resources.
2. Improvement of standard of living of fish workers.
3. Ensure availability of fish resources both for domestic consumption and for exports.
4. Continuing welfare activities for fishermen development.

The major programmes that are to be implemented to secure the objectives stated in the policy statement are:

1. to accord fish production and fish processing the status of agriculture and industry respectively. This will entitle the fishery sector to be eligible to receive all assistance/subsidies recommended for agriculture and industry from time to time.

2. to focus on artisanal fishermen who are engaged in fishing and fish related activities as special target group while implementing the fishery policy.

3. to make periodic assessment of the fishery resources available to the state so as to evolve sustainable fishing efforts.

4. to formulate an ‘Aquarian Reform’ relating to coastal waters of the state with an objective of ensuring ownership rights of fishing artifacts exclusively to real fishermen.
5. to encourage development of technology appropriate to the socio-economic conditions of the fishermen and to the state.

6. to limit the investment sufficient to exploit the fishery resources at a sustainable level. The technique of participatory management is to be used (fishermen’s participation) in such endeavours.

7. formation of an export policy emphasizing value added export without depriving fish availability to the domestic consumers.

8. ensure through appropriate legislation the right of first sale to the primary producers to save them from middlemen.

9. formation of a development and an infrastructure policy keeping into account the decentralised pattern of growth.

The Fishery policy is progressive as it strives to promote integrated development of the fishery. Further, the policy give recognition to the ideas of development which the real producers had in their mind and for which they had fought for more than two decades. In other words the government through this policy has concurred with the contention that the development paradigms must evolve organically from the internal dynamics of the sector rather than simply copying western paradigms. In fact, this was the pattern of development that took place in developed economies.

In sum, the labour process changes in LDCs give natural expression to certain unique development formulations which hinge upon the forces and
stimulants of development that spin off from the internal dynamics. Any development or policy paradigms inconsistent with such organic forces would cause social tensions. Kerala fishery is a typical example. The experience in Kerala fishery shows that such conflicts and tensions serve as a corrective force to bring in a more realistic development approach that would make development, participatory, equitable and sustainable. The following conclusions emerge from this analytical study of technology and labour process changes in the Kerala fishery.

1. Capitalist forces which are ingrained in modern development paradigms do not always work to help the LDCs as visualised by the modernists.

2. Development forces in a sector/society/economy must emerge from its internal dynamics.

3. Development agencies such as government should permit such forces of development to crystallise into institutions and arrangements and provide facilities for evolution and growth of such forces.

4. Ignoring information and knowledge base acquired by people over the years would be to the peril of the real development forces.
Notes

1. The tone of the laws were generally affirmed the importance of nurture fishery strategies where it recognised the time needed for stocks to replenish themselves, the need to conserve species diversity, the use of a range of selective techniques to take a seasonally diverse catch.

2. The importance of co-operative efforts to improve the economic conditions of fishermen was realised at the beginning of this century. In Kerala, the first fishermen society came into existence in 1917. By 1933, there were about 95 societies which were primarily functioned as credit societies. To strengthen such co-operatives the Govt. of Travancore in 1934 was advised by a Committee (Paramupillai, 1935) to convert them as multipurpose co-operatives and providing provisions of processing facilities such as curing yards and involvement of community leaders and constant Government support. The concept of ‘co-operatives’ thus involved a well thought out and integrated set of policies keeping the real producers at the central focus.

3. Apart from confidence in other capitalist principles (disguising them as same as growth principles/strategies) the modernisation attempts in the fishery impliedly believed in Lewisian type of development approach (Lewis, 1955). The whole concept of the development under the modernisation process was that the new height of capital regime would generate enough by the fishermen which would be re-cycled and the process to continue until all fishermen were brought in the ambit of modernisation!
4. A general feature of these co-operatives was that they created from above and handed down to fishers, quite irrational to the spirit of co-operativism.

5. In a study about the co-operatives and mechanisation and their impact on traditional fishermen, it was found that the benefits of mechanisation was usurped by a group of people who had set up fictitious fishery co-operatives (Hakim, 1980).

6. In a study on credit and indebtedness among the marine fishermen of Southern Kerala Platteau et. al, showed that the volume of credit and other institutional borrowings were positively correlated with the degree of mechanisation. Further, it was found that while major part of borrowings in the mechanised area was for investment, it was for consumption in the artisanal sector (Platteau. et. al, 1979).

7. Important Committees appointed by Government in fisheries were

1. Babu Paul Committee (1981)

8. Attempts to motorise the country crafts were done by fishermen individually and collectively at different hamlets of the coastal area. Some fishermen groups were succeeded in converting the country crafts to fix out board engines. This invention/adaptation wide spread all over the coastal area with in short time. Both Central and State Government policies also helped substantially to intensify this trend.
9. Resuscitative Committee on Fishing Co-operatives was constituted in 1975 to enquire into the failure of co-operative movement in fisheries.


11. In 1988, following an agitation threat by fish worker's unions (mainly Kerala Swathanthra Matsya Thozhilali Federation) the government had promulgated a partial ban by which all the trawler operating centres in the state except Neendakara, the largest centre in the state were ordered closed for the months of July and August.

12. Clamping of monsoon trawler bans was not an easy task for the State government since it involved a decision against the strong capitalist interest in the fishery and also at times against the Central Government's policies. The economics and politics of the trawler bans was discussed by John Kurien (Kurien, 1991).

13. Scientific opinion had confirmed that trawling is an ecologically destructive process. After 1952, when trawling had been introduced in the Indo-Norway region Project, it was banned in Norway. In 1976, trawling was banned in the Philippines since it destroys juvenile fish as well as organisms which fish feed on. In 1979, the University of Philippines and the College of Fisheries studied the impact of the ban and found that “In one year the biomass over all depths had doubled, while the most seriously affected depth range of 10 to 58m recovered to the extent that the biomass increased by more than 100 per cent”. The study stated that the imposition of a trawling ban is a suitable
tool in tropical waters to protect heavily exploited fish stocks to recover. The destructive process has been observed in Kerala also. According to experts, the life span of Prawn Stylifera is two years and it grows up to 110mm. Analysis of catch during monsoon seasons shows prawn sizes of 51-98mm. Besides many varieties of prawn like the highly prized prawn Indicus became extinct (Iyengar, 1985).

14. The State Government constituted a high powered committee in October 1992 comprising Fisheries Secretary as its Chairman and Fisheries Director as Convener. The Committee also included fishery scientists and experts in the socio-economic field. The committee submitted a draft report in April 1993.
References


15. Stanley, S., (1996), Impact of Trawling Ban on Primary Sector with Special Reference to Sakthikulangara Panchayat (M.Phil Dissertation), University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram.