



## Skill development in marine fisheries: Some reflections on the issues and way outs

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### ABSTRACT

Indian fisheries sector is receiving increasing attention and policy support owing to the livelihood and foreign exchange potential of the sector apart from its nutritional significance. The Government of India has initiated 'Blue Revolution' to augment the fish production and to strengthen the fish based value chain. But, unequipped manpower is often highlighted as one of the major deterrents for leveraging the full potential in harvest and post-harvest fisheries sector, which is highly skill intensive in nature. The issue would emerge more serious in case of marine fisheries. In this paper, we attempted to deliberate on the issue of skill-deficit that would emerge in harvest and post-harvest sectors of marine fisheries sector in India, and suggest measures to address them.

**Keywords:** Fisheries, Human resource, IPRs, Skill, Value chain

Indian fisheries sector is undergoing a sea change. The sector which has been the livelihood of traditional fishermen and processors has seen remarkable changes with advent of mechanisation across the value chain. The sector has seen remarkable policy support too. The Government of India has envisaged an ambitious plan to promote fisheries production in India and augment value generation out of fish-based industrial enterprises, in the form of blue revolution. Further, in tune with the international focus, India thrives to expand "blue economy" by harnessing ocean based economic activities.

However, the moot question is whether India can cash in from the reinvigorated investments and activities in marine and inland based economic activities. The question become imperative in the context of large skill-deficit in all the spheres of the fishery based activities. National Fisheries Policy 2020 has pointed out non-availability of skilled manpower as one of the major factors limiting the the development of the capture fisheries (Department of Fisheries 2020). This skill-deficit would emerge as a serious concern in utilising advanced technologies adopted by developed countries in all spheres of fishery activities including fishing, fish processing, value addition, to mention a few. Further, the world is moving towards better quality products harvested and processed using sustainable technologies, which require adoption of environmentally sustainable technologies. The skill-deficit would have much significance in both inland and marine sectors, though the

specific areas of skill-deficit would differ between them. The issue would emerge more serious in case of marine fisheries. In this paper we deliberate on the issue of skill-deficit that would emerge in harvest and post-harvest sectors of marine fisheries sector in India, and suggest measures to address them. While the article throws some light on the skill ecosystem in fisheries sector, the scope of the article is limited by the inadequacy of data on skill-gap and skilled human resource requirement in harvest and post-harvest fisheries sector.

### *Mechanisation of marine fisheries sector*

While in term of the crafts and gears used, Indian marine fisheries has transgressed to mostly mechanical from the traditional or artisanal over a period of time, the productivity from fishing activities remains depending to a large extent on the skill of the skipper who utilises his traditional knowledge or wisdom on marine ecosystem, water currents and behaviour of the aquatic animals including fish. Mechanisation required new skill sets with respect to vessel operation and gear handling (Ramakrishnan 1994). Also, advances in information and communication technologies have transformed fisheries into a highly information and knowledge-based enterprise. Consequently, the kind of skill requirement has also changed, with a need to have additional expertise in utilising these developments. While India has a vast coastline of about 8,118 km with a production of around 3.7 million tonnes of fish (as on 2020), the skill generation is not commensurate. It caters to only a minuscule of the total requirement. One of the important reasons is lack of awareness about the human resource requirement of fisheries among a large section of policy makers and inadequate investment in human resource

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development of fisheries sector in general and marine sector in particular.

#### *Skill development—the new mantra*

Skill development is the new mantra of the policy makers and development practitioners to promote the economic growth and equitable development of the country. The objective is to create an employable workforce as well as to optimally harness the resource with an aim to fuel subsequent chain of economic activities. Skilled manpower is *sin qua non* for quality conscious activities, particularly for those related to efficient utilisation of natural resources as in the case of agriculture, fisheries and animal husbandry.

The fisheries sector is characterised by the integration of natural resources with other stakeholders who have linkages with fisheries and other socio-political and economic variables (Ayyappan and Krishnan 2004). Harvest and post-harvest fisheries operations in marine fisheries are highly skill intensive. Further, marine fishing operations are one of the perilous occupations in the world. Since fishing has evolved from a traditional vocation, fishing and processing skills are considered inherent among fisheries communities and embedded in the local knowledge system. As D'Cruz (2004) has observed, fishermen have the culture of participative fishing, and are trained in the basics of fishing even from a very young age. They have inherited the skills over generations and sharpened it through experience and exposure. They continuously innovate and improve the fishing techniques (D'Cruz 2004) to sustain in the run for open access and limited resources, braving the odds of the nature. Informal apprenticeship kind of moulding is the norm, but targeted skill training is a must to harness the resources efficiently. While the number of crafts used has increased many fold, and the fishing gears has undergone a sea change, the formal training in using them effectively is inadequate. Reskilling and upskilling the traditional fishers to assimilate the technological changes is an area requiring policy focus. Responsible fishing, hygienic handling of fish on-board as well as post-landing, handling devices like echo sounder and GPS, sea safety practices, waste utilization, regulatory aspects in fishery sector, entrepreneurship development and value chain management, etc. are some of the areas among many, where skilling and reskilling are required.

The formal skill development approach is through formal education and skill development mechanisms through colleges and other institutions. Courses on fisheries sector is provided at graduate, post graduate and doctoral levels, mainly by fisheries colleges under and state governments. Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) provides the guidance in the curriculum and facility for higher studies at Central Institute of Fisheries Education (CIFE), at Mumbai and fisheries colleges across the country. Also, CIFNET (Central Institute of Fisheries Nautical Engineering and Training), Indian Maritime University and many private institutes provides training on different aspects of fisheries and nautical sciences. However, the trained manpower

Table 1. Annual requirement (numbers) of fisheries human resources in marine sector by 2019–2020

|                | Certificate/<br>informally | Diploma | UG   | PG  | PhD | UG &<br>above |
|----------------|----------------------------|---------|------|-----|-----|---------------|
| High growth    | 1956                       | 1225    | 1569 | 299 | 64  | 1932          |
| Average growth | 1671                       | 1088    | 1304 | 249 | 57  | 1610          |
| Low growth     | 1386                       | 951     | 1038 | 198 | 51  | 1288          |

Source: Ramarao *et al.* (2011).

under fisheries sector is quite inadequate to meet the demand. Ramarao *et al.* (2011) made an assessment of the human resource requirement in the marine fisheries sector for fulfilling various value chain related activities (Tables 1 and 3).

Further, the aquaculture, ornamental fisheries and other inland fisheries sector in India is fast growing to cater to the need of both domestic and international market. The Hindu (2018) has reported that the estimated demand of fisheries professionals and para-professionals will be in the range of 26,900 a year by 2022. With the existing intake capacity of 30 professional colleges in the country (i.e. 1079, 417 and 181 respectively for undergraduate, post-graduate and PhD programmes) there exists huge demand supply gap. There is also a need of skilled field workers.

#### *Migrant labourers*

An important issue of concern is the increasing proportion of migrant labourers in marine capture fisheries which is driven by increasing fleet size on one hand and reluctance of the newer generation of fisher folks in the traditional vocation on the other. Rao *et al.* (2016) pointed out that workers from non-fishermen population constituted 43% of the manpower required for fishing operations in 2010. A study by CMID (2018) found out that men from Assam and West Bengal having no prior experience in fishing were being employed in fishing boats in Kerala coast. The entry of migrant labourers to the skill intensive marine capture fisheries in large scale poses many challenges as they often do not even possess basic swimming skills. Thus, preparing them with the minimal requirement like swimming is essential, apart from other procedures like operation of gear and craft. Normally they start with sorting of different kinds of fish on board and slowly get upgraded to other activities. They need to be trained in all aspects of the fishing—from weather prediction to navigation and hauling.

#### *Deep sea fishing*

Deep sea fishing is an area, the potential of which is yet to be fully tapped. One major reason for the stagnation in production from marine fisheries sector is lower levels of exploitation of deep sea resources. Sinha *et al.* (2016) pointed out that future source of growth in marine sector will be deep sea and oceanic waters as near coastal area are fully utilised. Sinha *et al.* (2017) and Jha *et al.* (2020) have identified non-availability of skilled manpower as the major

limiting factor of deep sea fishing, which is further augmented by constraints in infrastructure development and lack of a strong Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) regime. CIFE standards, as mentioned in LMIS report on fisheries sector (ASCI, undated), prescribes that each deep sea vessel should have 15 fishermen, in addition to technicians and other professionals. The manpower drawn from non-fisher folk population has to be trained in all aspects of the fishing—from weather prediction to navigation and hauling. Rama *et al.* (2011) has projected number of deep sea fishing vessels by 2020 as 200 and required manpower as 900 certificate holders, 900 diploma holders, 150 under-graduates and 30 post-graduates. Recently, Government of India, has initiated an ambitious programme to explore the deep water fisheries through the *Blue Revolution* initiatives, and proposed to fund deep sea fishing vessels. This would need additional skilled manpower.

Fishermen from Thoothoor-Colachel region of South India are known for their deep sea fishing skills and seaworthiness, the outcome of traditional wisdom passed over generations and informal learning through experience (Shinoj *et al.* 2020). Making this tacit knowledge explicit can contribute a lot to the skill development of the fishers venturing to deep sea. For instance, deep sea fishing requires number of skill sets like operating large fishing vessels, fabrication of suitable gears, know how about propeller, hydraulics, equipment, ocean currents, fish availability etc. However, in view of changing labour profile of marine fisheries sector and lack of opportunity to learn the skills traditionally, new entrants into the labour market needs to be formally trained with safe and productive fishing from deep waters. This warrants documenting the traditional knowledge and imparting it through formal training. It requires a sea change in the institutional set up to train the labours and provide them required certificate. Only those who were trained successfully based on these training need to venture into sea for fishing.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India was developing a scheme for deep-sea fishing, which envisages financial support for traditional fishermen for skill up-gradation as well as for procuring suitable fishing vessels. Traditional fishermen group, fishers' associations and fisheries cooperatives will be benefitted (PIB 2016).

#### *Fish processing*

The importance of post-harvest fisheries sector lies not only in employment and livelihood perspective, but in terms of foreign exchange earnings also. The marine products export market is currently valued at USD 4.7 billion. Technological advancement has contributed a lot to the progress in the sector. Even then, skilled human resource has vital role in different realms of post-harvest fisheries. Apart from conducting the array of operations like cleaning, grading, operating machineries and packaging adhering to the quality parameters for food safety is also important.

Table 2. Manpower requirement in fish processing

| Year    | No. of working factories | Total number of persons | Average no. of persons per unit |
|---------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2000–01 | 260                      | 27,065                  | 104                             |
| 2001–02 | 256                      | 23,649                  | 92                              |
| 2002–03 | 264                      | 31,844                  | 121                             |
| 2003–04 | 281                      | 32,426                  | 115                             |
| 2004–05 | 283                      | 32,240                  | 114                             |
| 2005–06 | 318                      | 34,496                  | 108                             |
| 2014–15 | 404                      | 51,154                  | 126                             |
| 2019–20 | 460                      | 60,227                  | 131                             |

Source: ASCI, undated.

Presently, the fish processing industry is utilizing less than 30 to 40% of its installed capacity due to many issues including non-availability of quality manpower (NABARD 2018). As per ICAR-CIPHET study, losses in inland and marine fisheries were estimated to be 5.23% and 10.52% respectively. The study on mapping of human resource skill gaps in India till 2022 by National Skill Development Corporation of India has pointed out the lack of awareness of fishermen about preliminary processing, leading to inferior quality products. Further, inappropriate waste management practices are adding to the environmental woes. The study further pointed out that supervisors are yet to be familiarised with use of cold chain networks for logistic and storage as well as the operation of the new machines and the associated aspects of maintenance. Processing activities are labour absorbing, particularly for women and other skilled labourers. As Indian fish processing sector transgress to higher levels of processing, skill-deficit would emerge as major limiting factor.

A serious issue that hampers deep sea fishing and utilisation is the lack of skill in post-harvest handling of deep sea fishes, particularly that used for export, as in case of *Sashimi* grade tuna. Japan offers excellent market for exporting tuna, a capture fish from deep waters. *Sashimi* grade tuna requires specialised post-harvest handling, including inflicting least injuries to the fish while harvesting, for which India is not ready enough (CMFRI report). However, the tuna qualified as *Sashimi* grade fetches higher market prices compared to the chilled and frozen tuna. At present, India is not exporting *Sashimi* grade tuna to Japan, for want of such specialised skill and infrastructure. Since *Sashimi* grade tuna is consumed in raw form, without subjecting to processing and value addition, it needs to be maintained of high quality during the entire value chain operation. Harvesting practices and on-board handling being the major determinants of the quality and freshness of *Sashimi* grade tuna, high level of precision has to be mastered by the employees concerned. With the growing market for *Sashimi* grade tuna and tuna loins/ steaks, the Indian tunas have considerable prospects. Skilled employees are required for canning facility, as maximum processing take place in canning in addition to preparation of steaks and loins for export market. Shinoj *et al.* (2020)

pointed out that one major factor behind the lack luster economic performance of artisanal offshore fishing (AOSF) trips made by Thoothoor fishers is higher proportion of spoilage and low market price due to inadequate skill set of crew related to on-board fish handling. The skill development is also needed in the areas of handling of the gear (in particular monofilament long lines), use of baits, maintaining the quality during landing and storage, grading, packing and value addition (NFDB, undated). In the context of view of the acute shortage of trained manpower in this area, National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) has suggested to involve master trainers from Japan, Taiwan, etc. where tuna fishing is predominant. Policy level support is essential to leverage the gains from the processing and value addition of high value fishes as well as to regulate the unsustainable harvest driven by the lucrative profit from value addition and export of high value fish. Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) based in Kochi, Kerala has the know-how in various aspects of fish processing. The CIFT is imparting the skills and capabilities for processing ventures through trainings, consultancies and technology transfer programmes. Rais and Sharma (2014) pointed out that inadequate technical knowledge about new machines and associated aspects of maintenance is the important skill gap present in fish processing.

#### *Small scale fish processing*

Beyond the organised fish processing sector, small scale unorganised sector provides self-employment avenues for many prospective entrepreneurs who are trying to tap the increasing demand for processed and ready-to-eat marine products in the domestic market.

Small scale unorganised sector contribute to 82% of employment in Indian food processing sector (Rais and Sharma 2014). Value added fish and fishery products like dry fish, fish based extruded snack products, battered and breaded products etc. are capturing the market. Even then paucity of skilled human resources is creating hurdles for the growth and development of the sector. Skill development in these areas can add a lot to the livelihood improvement of the rural poor especially women. An assessment of skill deficit and needs in the fish processing segment in areas where unorganised/informal employment exists pointed to the issue of inadequate knowledge of processes. Apart from the fisheries research institutes, colleges and universities, Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) with their versatile presence in every district can play a major role in this. In case of small scale fish (SSF) processors, skill development has to be complemented with access to infrastructural facilities like hygienic working location, processing equipment, availability of inputs like running water, electricity, packaging materials as well as handholding in marketing and promotional activities. Custom hiring facilities can be set up by local self-governments/technology institutes for catering the requirements of small scale processors. Since, a number of women groups in rural areas are involved in small scale fish processing, such facilities can add to their

productive capacity which in turn will help achieving greater financial autonomy. Rejula *et al.* (2017) has observed that previous experience, existing skill, and duration of skill development programme are positively correlated with effectiveness of women led small scale fishery enterprises in Kerala.

Recognizing the importance of skill development for the development of the national economy, the government of India, has come out with the Skill India Mission. Such initiatives have to be appropriated for the small scale fish processing entrepreneurs.

#### *Intellectual Property Rights*

The fisheries sector has been witnessing many innovations by different actors in the fisheries innovation system. Since inventions or innovations are the end products of intellectual efforts and other resources, innovators should be rewarded by providing protection to their innovativeness (Sheeja *et al.* 2012). Technologies in the fisheries can receive protection by patents, trademarks, geographic indications, copyright, and design. These technologies receive protection by one or a combination of different IPRs depending upon the nature of technology. The areas of patenting in marine fisheries sector includes the technologies and methodologies in fishing, processing, and aquaculture/mariculture, pharmaceuticals, nutraceuticals, food and feed, bioactive compounds, etc. (Singh and Chakarborty 2015). Marine organisms have various biotechnological applications in the area of health, environment and mariculture. As per Indian Patent Act, Section 3(j), plants and animals in whole or any part thereof other than GMO and essentially biological processes for production or propagation of plants and animals are not patentable in India. However, IPA allows for patenting whole organisms like transgenics, with human intervention (Ayyappan *et al.* 2011, Singh and Chakarborty 2019).

These issues point out the importance of human resource development in the area of intellectual property protection. Fishery research institutes in ICAR have already initiated steps to protect the intellectual property in their domain. Skill development in this area can facilitate identification of the technologies with potential for IPR protection, commercialisation and diffusion.

#### *Food safety and quality assurance*

Food safety standards with respect to general hygiene and contaminants (microbial and chemical) in fish and fishery products are evolving over time in response to emerging challenges, scientific advancements, apprehensions of consumers and policy directives. Many countries are making rules and regulations more and more stringer to ensure the quality of imported fish and fishery products (Raymond and Ramachandran 2017). Seafood safety and quality assurance is an area which is increasingly being recognised with changing dimension in the arena of food safety. Despite the severe food safety measures initiated by the Indian government, border rejections were

increasing over time. Now the major concern related to border rejection is residues of antibiotics and bacterial inhibitors (Raymond and Ramachandran 2017). It is pertinent to have the skilled work force in the area of food safety and quality assurance to assure consumers' safety as well as to enhance the competitiveness in the export market. Ryder *et al.* (2014) has highlighted the importance of fish hygiene training. Trained manpower is key to the successful implementation of the HACCP programme in seafood processing establishments.

#### Development and extension

It is estimated that the demand for highly skilled manpower for fisheries sector will increase manifold. Enhancing the technical skill and quality of fisheries manpower in tune with emerging opportunities and challenges is must to promote fisheries in the future. Capacity building in the areas of non-fisheries skill such as communication of information, group mobilization are also important for sustainable fisheries management in addition to fisheries specific skills (fisheries science, fisheries management, fisheries law, fishing technology, processing technology, etc.) (Keshavanath 2015).

Role of fisheries extension in transferring the information and innovations to the stakeholders and communicating the policies through actionable programmes is well known. To be effective, the fisheries extension system should have qualified human resource in required strength. Though the status of public sector fisheries extension professionals in India is not well documented, available information shows that it is quite low and needs to be enhanced (Sajesh *et al.* 2018). The data collected from the websites of state fisheries departments of Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal indicates that there are only about 850 and 734 fisheries extension personnel in these states, respectively. This appears to be insufficient considering the vast coastline and fish production in those states. The states are only representative in indicating the inadequacy of fisheries extension personnel, and the situation is grave in other states too. In Kerala, where fisheries is a major contributor to the food and livelihood security, the extension professionals (in *Matsyabhavans* and *Matsyafed*, the extension wing of the department of fisheries) sums up around 250 only, which has to be increased to address the existing and emerging issues in the sector. Further, in maritime states have to implement newer regulations in tandem with the Code of Conduct of Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) of Food and Agricultural Organisation, to ensure long term sustainability of marine fisheries. Kerala Government has notified Kerala Marine Fisheries Regulation Act in 2018, which proposes regulatory mechanisms in detail on several aspects of marine fisheries including fishing license, regulation of craft and gear, bycatch reducing mechanisms, regulation of boat building yards and net manufacturing units, etc which requires regular extension activities and inspections.

Table 3. Projections for fisheries development and extension agencies by 2019–20

| Scenario             | Certificate/<br>informally<br>trained | Diploma | UG    | PG    | PhD |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|-------|-------|-----|
| High growth scenario | 7,288                                 | 1,094   | 6,158 | 1,405 | 68  |
| Low growth scenario  | 4,556                                 | 684     | 3,849 | 878   | 33  |

Source: Ramarao *et al.* (2011).

#### Way forward

*Enhancing quality training centres and leveraging networking:* Competency enhancement of the fisheries professionals and para-professionals is an area requiring due attention. The personnel in the department of fisheries are to be trained in the areas like entrepreneurship development, innovations in monitoring, control and surveillance, legal and regulatory issues in fishery sector, catch data analytics and market intelligence systems in fisheries, resource monitoring techniques and climate change impacts on fishery ecosystems. ICAR institutes, Fisheries Universities/colleges have a number of training programmes for catering the needs of heterogeneous stakeholders. State level fisheries professionals, para-professionals and private technicians can be trained using such facilities. Also, networking of state department of fisheries with national level institutions, laboratories and training centres can help in addressing the varying training needs of the stakeholders.

*Reorienting skill trainings:* Customising the skill development programmes organised by various agencies and institutes to the priorities of the sector is an important issue. Reorienting the trainings by suiting it to the needs of the trainees and industry is a must. The national and state level fisheries development plans and management policies should also be taken care of while designing the trainings (Keshavanath 2015).

Also the auditability of the trainees, availability of resources and training partners, etc. have to be assessed (EAC 2019). Technical skills are necessary, but not sufficient as non-technical and managerial skills should also be promoted. Skills in effective communication, participatory planning and implementation are quite important. Also development of training infrastructure needs to be emphasised.

Fisheries cooperatives can be used as the suitable platform for skill training programmes. The financial constraints in organising large-scale skill training programmes can be eased by linking it with agencies like Agricultural Skill Council of India, National Fisheries Development Board, Ministry of Rural Development, etc. Agriculture Skill Council of India has listed various skills required by marine capture fishermen and primary processors. ASCI has developed qualification pack for Fish and sea food processing technician also.

Private extension efforts at field level by industries

and consultants needs to be encouraged. Strengthening state level training mechanism is another issue to be considered. It is also important to involve seasoned traditional fishermen as trainers so as to leverage their experience and wisdom which can be easily related with other fishers.

### Conclusion

Fisheries is a sunrise sector. The multidimensional growth of the sector offers employment avenues to venture some aspirants. At the same time, the sector needs skilled human resource at various levels to sustain the growth. Of late, the sector is gaining policy attention owing to the potential contribution of the sector to the national economy. Diverse set of skills are required to leverage the potential of the fisheries sector to the benefit of the nation, it is important to augment the skills of various stakeholders. Assessing the human resource requirement and skill gap in various domains of the sector has to be carried out at the outset. Establishment of fisheries training centres and renewing the existing training centres is important. Involvement of fisher folks and private sector at various nodes of the knowledge value chain can add to the efforts of the public sector in strengthening the fisheries skill ecosystem. Mandatory skill level certification of migrant workers can be considered as a promising strategy, though the implementation may face many difficulties. Deep sea fishing and high value processing are the areas demanding speedy action to overcome the skill deficit. Small-scale fish processing has huge potential for employment generation. Promotion of entrepreneurship development in this area requires more attention. Of late, quality assurance is emerging as a major concern in the seafood value chain. Human resource development in the area of hygienic handling as well as formulation and implementation standards and rules is the need of the hour. Efficient mechanism for dissemination of technologies and information to the relevant stakeholders is important to maintain the vibrancy of the sector, but often neglected and demands policy attention. Fisheries extension system needs to be strengthened by enhancing the human and financial resource base.

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