



CATALYSING SUSTAINABLE GROWTH OF MARINE FISHERIES

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There is a continuous increasing trend in the international fish trade. But, there are numerous challenges being faced by the marine fisheries in Pakistan. It is fact that the development of marine fisheries has provided extra edge to many nations with its significant contribution in their GDP.

Fish generates foreign exchange thus considered the most precious commodity. According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report 2004, marine fishery is the main source of livelihood and poverty alleviation for coastal communities worldwide. In Asia, there are 21 million fishermen and 18.9 million fish farmers.

If we discuss the case of Pakistan's marine fisheries then it's pretty clear that the Pakistani maritime zone is blessed with rich biodiversity including abundant variety of quality fish which has an important role in the export-based economy despite its negligible share in GDP i.e. approximately 0.14%, which can be increased manifold if best practices are ensured by all stakeholders.

There are issues of fish stock in marine waters. According to FAO report, 70% of fish stock among 12 of 16 FAO's global statistical regions are fully or over-exploited. The same scenario has prevailed in Pakistan too as available data shows a continuous decreasing/or stagnant trend in fish production for which erroneous and manipulated data could be the major reason.

It is evident from my recent visits to Korangi, Karachi and Gadani fish harbours that harmful fishing gears i.e. Gujja, Gillnet, and many more dangerous nets are in practice which is depleting juvenile stock. Among others, unhygienic condition at harbours due to untreated industrial and domestic effluent, shrinking of mangroves due to tempering of environment and high mortality ratio due to lack of proper and healthy seeds, illegal jetties and redundant traditional practices for storage/processing are the key reasons behind the decline of reported fish production/export.

It is a matter of grave concern for the customs procedures and income tax net that unreported fish landing is being practiced through illegal jetties which are neither owned/ or licenced by provincial nor the federal government, maybe having loose links with Boat registration and issuance of a fishing license. Approximately more than 23000 fishing boats are registered with Mercantile Marine Department (MMD) whereas the actual number at sea is conflicting. The quality of life of fishermen at sea is miserable. Fishermen are not well educated and trained on coast. There is no early warning system exists in a highly vulnerable zone where any climate extreme event might be havoc for them.

Regarding best practices, it was learned during my recent visit to China's coastal belt areas that the Chinese government has overcome these kinds of issues in an innovative way. Chinese practices include Mari-aqua and polyculture techniques, breeding of new strains with disease resistance, establishment of high-health seed stock, establishment of healthy culture systems, fast diagnosis and checking techniques for disease, vaccination, development of high-quality feed and additives with ecosystem optimization techniques. There are about 20278 recorded marine species in China, including 3032 finfish species, 1923 snails and shellfishes, 734 crabs, 546 shrimps, and 790 seaweed. Marine biological species in China account for about 10% of the world's total.

In 2018, total value of fisheries based economy in China reached approximately 368 Billion US\$, accounting for approximately 2.87% of GDP of that year. The fisher-folk population of China in 2018 was 18.79 million; among which 6.18 million persons were traditional fishermen and 13.26 million persons were practitioners. Per capita net income of fishing families of China was 2826 US\$/annum in 2018, an increase of 7.76% over the previous year.

In order to protect its marine fisheries resources, China has adopted the strategy of "zero growth" for offshore fishing for more than 10 years. Ocean catch is basically maintained at the level year 2000 baseline. China has enhanced its control over the number of fishing vessels and fishing gears as well as horsepower and strengthened the implementation of fishing license system, further reduced the use of fishing methods such as trawl netting and stow netting that post great threat to resources.

In a nutshell, this sector needs a prompt response at federal and provincial levels in Pakistan. FY 2020-21 Budget Planning Cycle is already started, so, it is right time for the Fisheries Development Board, GoP to rationalize proper budget provision for mariculture development and also explore the PPP avenues which would help in uplifting the livelihood of coastal communities apart from increase of sectoral share in national GDP to a greater extent.

In addition, ensure proper monitoring systems on fishing vessels, ban on illegal jetties, establish fish catch data reporting system, promote mariculture, empower fishermen through SME development and adopt latest technologies such as being practiced in China for the overall fishery system from catch to processing and export. The government should put into practice proper vocational training centers for the capacity building of fishermen. Exposure visits to China's fishery would add value to the training of all actors in the overall value chain involved.