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# Functioning of Fishing Cooperative Societies in Selected States of India

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## ABSTRACT

In India and other developing countries, the role of institutional support and social connectedness among fishing communities is played by and large by conventional fishermen groups, fishermen cooperative societies, federations, etc. These organizations by their very nature and reason for existence are aimed at increasing the maximum output from the fishery resources and thereby, increasing the livelihood, income and wellbeing of their members. In India, fishing cooperative societies have been studied by very few researchers and most of these studies have focused on performance of fishing cooperatives on production, marketing and financial aspects. Fishing cooperative societies as a social organization have not adequately been studied in India. This paper reports findings from a study undertaken to assess the internal functioning of the fishing cooperative societies established and promoted under different scenarios. The study covered 58 fishing cooperative societies in three states viz. Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

**Keywords:** Fishing, Communities, Cooperative, Societies, Social organization

## INTRODUCTION

The fishery co-operative movement in India began in 1913 when the first fishermen's society was organised under the name of 'Karla Machhimar Co-operative Society' in Maharashtra. The structure continued to grow into multi-functional units at the primary level, federations at district/regional, state and national levels (Malhotra and Sinha, 2007). In fisheries sector, in the developed countries (and some of the developing countries like Bangladesh, Philippines, etc.) several new groups and professional associations of fishing communities have emerged in recent two - three decades. In India and other developing countries, this role of institutional support and social connectedness among fishing communities is played, by and large, by conventional fishermen groups, fishermen cooperative societies, federations, etc (though there have been instances where fishing communities, on their own or with the help of some local Non-Government Organization, have acted in informal way outside the purview of formal cooperatives to achieve common good, particularly in the states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, etc.). There are 17 State federations, 108 Central societies, 11,847 Primary societies of fisher folks having a membership of 19,17,305.

Most of the fishing cooperative societies have been established to coordinate production and marketing of fish harvests and to avail benefits of government schemes. Major part of the fishing cooperative movement in the country has been a state promoted initiative. There are, however, exceptions to this, for example, fishing cooperative societies organized and supported by some NGOs in southern states such as in Tamil Nadu and Kerala by South Indian Federation of Fish workers Societies (SIFFS); societies organized at Tawa reservoir and Bergi reservoir in M.P. by the Kisan Adivasi Sangthan and Bergi Bandh Visthapit Sangh, respectively.

In India, fishing cooperative societies have been studied by very few researchers (Singh and Dhar Choudhary, 1997; Bhatta, 1997; Nair and Singh, 1997; Rahim and Singh, 1997; Moorti and Chauhan, 1997; Deepak, 1998; Das, 1992; Singh and Bhattacharya, 1991; Chatterjee & Bandyopadhyay, 1990; Jyotishi and Parthasarathy 2007, Tyagi *et al.*, 2007 and Tyagi *et al.*, 2008). In most of the cases, the fishermen's cooperatives have been found successful and were able to retain the loyalty of their members. However, these organizations by their very nature and reason for existence have focussed on increasing the maximum

output from the fishery resources and thereby, increasing the livelihood, income and wellbeing of their members. Though there have been instances where these fisher folk organizations have played an important role in resource enhancement and management of fishery resources.

Most of these studies, barring a few recent ones, have been conducted by economists and focused on performance of fishing cooperatives on production, marketing and financial aspects. Performance of any user organization of any scale in any sector depends, to a large extent, on its internal functioning, i.e. on the extent and dynamics of different processes which take place as a result of interactions and role playing by its members. Studies on this aspect of fishing cooperative societies have not been conducted. Thus, fishing cooperative societies as a social organization have not been studied in India. The present study was undertaken to assess the internal functioning of the fishing cooperative societies established and promoted under different scenarios.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study covered 58 fishing cooperative societies at the following identified locations of three selected states: Gobind Sagar and Pong reservoirs (H.P.); Tawa and Bergi reservoirs (M.P.) and societies from Sultanpur, Faizabad, Ambedkarnagar, Jhansi and Lalitpur districts (U.P.). A total of 580 members and office bearers of fishing cooperative societies were interviewed with the help of a specially prepared questionnaire.

The internal functioning of the fishing cooperative societies was operationalised in terms of the sum total of perceived opinion and experiences of fisher folk members about six dimensions namely: adequacy and openness of communication in the society’s functioning; effectiveness of leadership for working

towards society’s good; decision-making process in the society; participation of members in society’s activities; mutual trust among members, and satisfaction of members with the performance of the society. An index was prepared which consisted of 24 statements related to the above mentioned six dimensions (4 statements for each dimension). Both negative and positive statements were included in the index so that the responses of the respondents could be cross-checked. The opinion/experiences of the member fisher folks was sought on a three point rating scale (in the form of: always, sometimes, never; OR in the form of: agree, disagree, can’t say; OR very much, less, not at all; depending upon the nature of statement) and scores 3, 2, 1 were given for each positive statement. The scores were reversed in case of negative statements. Thus, total score for each dimension could range 4-12, whereas overall score of a respondent could range 24-72. The responses could be analyzed using simple distribution statistics and respondents could be categorized into three categories (having high, medium and low perception towards functioning of the fishing cooperative societies) based on their mean scores and the standard deviation.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The functioning of the fishing cooperative societies was measured with the help of a specially prepared index which consisted of six dimensions. The results are presented in Tables 1 & 2. The data (Table 1) revealed that the overall functioning of the fishing cooperative societies at Gobindsagar and Pong (HP), and Tawa and Bergi reservoirs was on the higher side (mean score above 43 out of 72), where as, it was low (mean score 25.61 out of 72) for members at the small reservoir & lakes of UP. Though majority of the respondents at most of the locations perceived the functioning of fishing cooperative societies in the medium category but, greater portion of the respondents (approx. one-

**Table 1: Overall functioning of fishing cooperative societies in different states**

Overall functioning of fishing cooperative societies	Gobindsagar reservoir, H.P. (N=110) f (%)	Pong reservoir, H.P. (N=90) f (%)	Tawa reservoir, M.P. (N=100) f (%)	Bergi reservoir, M.P. (N=150) f (%)	Small lakes of U.P. (N=90) f (%)
Low	16 (14.5)	08 (8.9)	10 (10.0)	20 (13.3)	32 (35.5)
Medium	68 (61.9)	61 (67.8)	58 (58.0)	94 (62.7)	52 (57.8)
High	26 (23.6)	21 (23.3)	32 (32.0)	36 (24.0)	06 (6.7)
Mean	43.05	44.09	45.21	45.94	25.61
SD	3.26	2.11	2.73	2.73	4.32

third of the total studied) at the sites of UP perceived the functioning of fishing cooperative societies in the low category. Over one-fourth of the respondents at all locations, except at the sites of UP, perceived the functioning of fishing cooperative societies in the high category. The responses of the fisher folks on each of the individual dimension of the functioning of fishing cooperative societies were also analyzed. It is clear from the data (Table 2) that the same trend was discernible with respect to all the dimensions of the functioning of the cooperative societies at the selected locations. A closer look at the data reveals that on dimensions communication, leadership, decision-making and participation, the respondents of from Tawa and Bergi reservoirs of M.P. perceived their societies to be

functioning slightly better than even the societies of Himachal Pradesh. The difference, though minor, could be because of the involvement of a non-governmental organization at these locations which was playing educational and mass mobilization roles among the members of fishing cooperative societies. Detail informal interviews with the respondents revealed that cooperative societies in H.P. and M.P., besides playing routine production-oriented and regulatory functions like coordinating and regulating the collection and marketing of fishery of their members, providing a structural base for state agencies to collect royalty from fish production, facilitating equitable sharing of benefits among their members, maintaining proper records, etc; also played a number of educational roles. These roles

**Table 2: Functioning of fishing cooperative societies on selected dimensions**

Dimension of functioning	Gobindsagar reservoir, H.P. (N=110)	Pong reservoir, H.P. (N=90)	Tawa reservoir, M.P. (N=100)	Bergi reservoir, M.P. (N=150)	Small lakes of U.P. (N=90)
<b>Communication</b>					
Low	16 (14.6)	19 (27.1)	12 (12.0)	28 (19.7)	37 (41.1)
Medium	70 (63.6)	51 (56.7)	62 (62.0)	87 (58.0)	50 (55.6)
High	24 (21.8)	20 (22.2)	26 (26.0)	35 (23.3)	03 (3.3)
Mean	7.16	7.07	7.46	7.36	4.43
SD	0.76	0.73	0.71	0.61	1.86
<b>Leadership</b>					
Low	18 (16.4)	15 (16.7)	12 (12.0)	20 (13.3)	38 (42.2)
Medium	68 (61.8)	55 (61.1)	58 (58.0)	95 (63.4)	48 (53.3)
High	24 (21.8)	20 (22.2)	30 (30.0)	35 (23.3)	04 (4.5)
Mean	7.07	7.12	7.50	7.58	4.43
SD	0.75	0.79	0.81	0.75	1.86
<b>Decision-making</b>					
Low	20 (18.2)	12 (13.3)	11 (11.0)	22 (14.7)	34 (37.8)
Medium	65 (59.1)	63 (70.0)	57 (57.0)	90 (60.0)	50 (55.6)
High	25 (22.7)	15 (16.7)	32 (32.0)	38 (25.3)	06 (6.6)
Mean	6.82	6.93	7.29	7.37	3.91
SD	0.92	1.0	0.94	0.82	1.33
<b>Trust</b>					
Low	14 (12.7)	09 (10.0)	15 (15.0)	28 (19.7)	26 (28.9)
Medium	62 (56.4)	61 (67.8)	55 (55.0)	93 (62.0)	56 (62.2)
High	34 (30.9)	20 (22.2)	30 (30.0)	29 (19.3)	08 (8.9)
Mean	7.00	7.10	7.20	6.95	4.86
SD	0.81	0.86	0.81	0.70	1.20
<b>Participation</b>					
Low	13 (11.8)	12 (13.3)	09 (9.0)	18 (12.0)	30 (33.3)
Medium	65 (59.1)	50 (55.6)	56 (56.0)	96 (64.0)	54 (60.0)
High	32 (29.1)	28 (31.1)	35 (35.0)	36 (24.0)	06 (6.7)
Mean	7.10	6.85	7.35	7.45	3.82
SD	0.92	0.79	0.93	0.82	1.38
<b>Performance</b>					
Low	14 (12.7)	09 (10.0)	11 (11.0)	26 (17.3)	31 (34.4)
Medium	67 (60.0)	61 (67.8)	58 (58.0)	90 (60.0)	55 (61.2)
High	29 (26.3)	20 (22.2)	31 (31.0)	34 (22.7)	04 (4.4)
Mean	7.30	7.42	7.45	7.10	4.16
SD	0.85	0.70	0.83	0.78	1.52

The figures in parentheses indicate the percentage

included: providing an organizational base at grass- root level for state fish agencies to implement resource enhancement measures, offer suggestions to state agencies and eager to innovate for improving resources, facilitate equitable sharing of benefits among its members, provide moral support to their members, devise mechanisms & procedures to coordinate the fishing efforts and fish marketing activities, undertake efforts and serve as a social & organizational force for making members to abide by conservation rules and make and implement own conservation rules

In U.P. however, the situation was altogether different. The respondents perceived their societies to be functioning very low on all the selected dimensions. Informal interactions with the respondents revealed that the cooperative institutions were mostly dormant in U.P., controlled by influential people without much involvement of members. They were formed for taking advantage of Govt. schemes. The element of social & organizational force for members was not there in fishing cooperative societies of U.P.

### CONCLUSION

Overall functioning of the fishing cooperative societies was high in H.P. and M.P. However, it was low in U.P. Higher functioning of the fishing cooperative societies in H.P. may be partly due to their higher socio-economic status. However, this may largely be due to the fact that in H.P., a system of cooperative management of these resources have been developed by the state fisheries department over last three decades. Thus, effective functioning of fishing cooperative societies and greater efforts of the state fisheries department in working closely with the fishing cooperative societies and their members, may have contributed towards higher perception of the functioning of the fishing cooperative societies in H.P. In M.P., the higher functioning of the fishing cooperative societies at the selected Tawa and Bergi reservoirs may be due to other reasons. Actually, the fisher folks at these two reservoirs, who are dam-displaced people, had organized themselves into fishing cooperative societies and federations with the help of NGOs and social workers and struggled to take the fishing and management rights in these respective reservoirs. Thus, due to this experience of organization, collective mobilization and participation in the fisheries management, functioning of their fishing cooperative

societies may be high at these locations. However, no such efforts have taken place in U.P., therefore, fisher folks in U.P. had perceived very low level of the functioning of the fishing cooperative societies.

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