



Blue Revolution that Will be

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(The editorial is based on the article “Blue revolution that will be” which appeared in the Indian Express for 2nd March 2019. In this article, we will discuss the issues related with fisheries in India.)

The ‘fisheries and aquaculture sector’ is recognized as the sunshine sector in Indian agriculture. It stimulates the growth of the number of subsidiary industries and is the source of livelihood for a large section of the economically backward population, especially fishermen, of the country. It helps in increasing food supply, generating adequate employment opportunities and raising the nutritional level. **It has a huge export potential and is a big source of foreign exchange earnings for the country.**

- **Fisheries are the primary source of livelihood for several communities.** In order to meet the ever-increasing demand for animal protein, global fish production should touch 196 million tonnes by 2025 — it currently stands at 171 million tonnes.
- **A concentrated effort by an independent department could help the government achieve its objective of doubling farmers’ income,** provided its policies to address the challenge of sustainability.
- **India is the world’s second-largest fish producer with exports worth more than Rs 47,000 crore.**
- Fisheries are the **country’s single-largest agriculture export**, with a growth rate of 6-10 % in the past five years.
- Its significance is underscored by the fact that the growth rate of the farm sector in the same period is around 2.5%.
- **India has a marine fisher population of 3.5 million; 10.5 million people are engaged in inland fishery and fish farming.**

Issues

- **India’s fisheries sector faces the challenge of sustainability.** The Food and Agriculture Organisation’s State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture reports note that

nearly 90% of the marine fish stocks have either been fully-exploited, or over-fished or depleted to an extent that recovery may not be biologically possible.

- **The productivity is low** — in terms of per fisher, per boat and per farm. In Norway, a fisherman/farmer catches/produces 250 kg per day while the Indian average is four to five kg.
- Marine capture fishery comprises largely of small fishermen who operate traditional boats — either non-motorised vessels or boats with a basic outboard motor. **These vessels cannot operate beyond nearshore waters.**
- **High-value species such as tuna cannot be caught by fishermen who use these vessels.** This means that while the near-shore coastal waters are highly overfished, the high-value fish stock proliferates in the deep seas.
- **The fisheries sector is in its nascent stage; the fiscal and policy support not well developed;** significant cost disadvantages on account of import dependence of raw materials which negates the low labour cost advantages too.

Way Forward

- **Harnessing the resources related to the fisheries sector** will bring immense benefits to fishing communities.
- **The new National Policy on Marine Fisheries** talks of introducing deep-sea fishing vessels and assisting fishing communities to convert their vessels and gears for the waters beyond.
- **The policy envisages intensive fish farming** through increased stocking of seed, better feed quality and diversification of species. Innovative practices such as recirculatory aquaculture system aim to realize the goal of more crop per drop. As a result, the productivity of freshwater fish farms has gone up.
- **More area should be brought under fish farming.** The government has invested in hatcheries to meet the ever-increasing demand for good quality fish seed. The expansion of aquaculture can increase this demand exponentially. Future policies must prioritize seed production in order to attain self-sufficiency in the sector.
- The introduction of **cage culture in reservoirs and other open water bodies can also increase the output.** This new practice gives freedom to fishermen from the risk of traversing dangerous rivers and restricted reservoirs.
- **Government should fill the large infrastructure gaps in fisheries sector** in the country through developing infrastructure projects such as fishing harbours/ fish landing centres, fish seed farms, fish feed mills/plants, setting up of disease diagnostic and aquatic quarantine facilities, creation of cold chain infrastructure facilities such as ice plants, cold storage, fish transport facilities, fish processing units, fish markets, etc.
- **Regular stocking of reservoirs and other water bodies can be done to increase in fish catch.** Open sea cage culture is at a pilot stage and the initial trials have given promising results. This may prove another game changer.
- **There should be an increased investment for the Blue Revolution to supplement**

the fisheries sector.

- The new fisheries department is expected to give undivided attention to creating and strengthening infrastructure facilities in marine and inland fisheries and give a boost to aquaculture and post-harvest activities.
- **Comprehensive fisheries education and research should be promoted.**
- The country should be producing more than 15 million tonnes of fish by the end of 2019. It should be on its way to becoming a hub for sustainable fish production.

There is a need to be cautious of falling prey to the temptation of introducing large-scale industrial fishing. **We must factor in the sustainability challenges and acknowledge that fishing is a primary livelihood activity for a large number of communities and individuals.** The policies framed by the new department should aim at enhancing productivity, better returns, and increased incomes.

Blue revolution

The Blue Revolution, launched by the central government, focuses on creating an enabling environment for integrated and holistic development and management of fisheries for the socio-economic development of the fishers and fish farmers.

The scheme has the following components:

- National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) and its activities.
- Development of Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture.
- Development of Marine Fisheries, Infrastructure and Post-Harvest Operations.
- Strengthening of Database & Geographical Information System of the Fisheries Sector.
- Institutional Arrangement for Fisheries Sector.
- Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) and other need-based Interventions.
- National Scheme on Welfare of Fishermen.

The scheme aims to enhance the fish production from 107.95 lakh tonnes in 2015-16 to about 150 lakh tonnes by the end of the financial year 2019-20.

It is also expected to augment the export earnings with a focus on increased benefit flow to the fishers and fish farmers to attain the target of doubling their income.

The government has launched Mission Fingerling to achieve the Blue Revolution.

The government has identified 20 States based on their potential and other relevant factors to strengthen the Fish Seed infrastructure in the country.

The program will facilitate the establishment of hatcheries and Fingerling rearing pond to ensure fish production.