Unemployment and Labour Redeployment among Trawler Workers during Trawl Ban Period

Central Institute of Fisheries Technology, Cochin
*Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur

The 45 day trawl ban during monsoon season affects nearly 30,000 labourers working in 5,000 mechanised crafts (small trawlers) in Kerala. They are either alternatively employed (in the traditional sector or otherwise) or are unemployed during the period. It was observed that unemployment levels of the trawler workers are high during the ban period in Munambam and Ponnani, two of the major fishing centres studied. Only a quarter of the total workforce in trawlers could find alternative employment. Labour movement towards grounds closer to their homes was also observed. In Ponnani, very few shifted to the traditional sector. Although the percentage of redeployment of trawler workers to traditional crafts is very low, from the observations made during Chakara (at Pathankadaparam (Malappuram) and Koorikuzhi (Thrissur)), it was found that there was redeployment of trawler workers on mini trawlers, large plank built crafts and small plank built crafts. Less than 30 per cent of the respondents favoured the imposition of the ban, because of economic and livelihood considerations.

Mechanisation of fishing vessels in the late 1950s was probably the most important milestone in the developmental history of Kerala fisheries. By the mid-1960s mechanisation picked up and small trawlers started operating. The 'modernisation/growth oriented model' was also supported by measures from the Government (Kurien & Achari, 1990). The obvious technological differences between the traditional and mechanised sectors brought about a disparity in the wealth distribution leading to a growing rift between the two sectors (Chandran, 1990). Regulation of some sort was initiated for the first time in the country through introduction of the Kerala Marine Fishing Regulation Act (1980). Besides registration and licensing of boats, regulation of mesh size of nets, prohibition of certain fishing methods and delimitation of fishing zones, declaration of closed season (Anon, 1891) were also provided for, in the Act. This aspect of closed season was later studied by various expert committees appointed by the Government of Kerala (Kalawar et al., 1985; Nair, 1989). On the basis of their recommendations, a partial ban on trawling during monsoon season with minor variations has been in place since 1988.

The Study

The monsoon trawl ban imposed by the Government of Kerala for the past ten years affects nearly 30,000 labourers working in 5,000 mechanised fishing crafts. They are either unemployed during the period or do odd jobs. Results of investigation on the nature and extent of unemployment in the mechanised sector during the ban period is dealt with in this paper. One observation is that some labourers from the mechanised sector migrate to the traditional sector during the ban and return to work on mechanised fishing boats soon after it is lifted. In view of this, this study also probes the extent of this redeployment. An attempt is also made to quantify the attitude of the trawler workers towards the imposition of the ban.

Data were collected during the 45 day ban period of 1999 from individuals (labourers in both traditional and mechanised sectors) at major landing centres from Ponnani to Alappuzha through interview method.

Observations

It was observed that unemployment levels of the trawler workers were high during the ban period in two of the major fishing centres studied. Munambam and Ponnani (Table 1). Only a quarter of the total workforce in trawlers were alternatively employed during this period. In Munambam, of the total number of workers who would work elsewhere during the ban period, 70 per cent were from Colachal in Tamil Nadu, temporarily migrating to their native fishing villages. The remaining 30 per cent, from neighbouring places (like Alappuzha, Karunagappally, Azhikode, Mullanakkara, Paravur etc.) also would go back to their respective villages for working in traditional crafts, or would engage themselves in related activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>Munambam harbour</th>
<th>Ponnani harbour</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of mechanised crafts</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of labourers employed</td>
<td>2700</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>4500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of labourers redeployed or alternatively employed during ban period</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>1100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of redeployment/alternative employment</td>
<td>25.93</td>
<td>22.22</td>
<td>24.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment during ban</td>
<td>74.07</td>
<td>77.78</td>
<td>75.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What was clear from the observations at Munambam was that there was labour movement towards home grounds in search of employment. In Ponnani, on the other hand, although the percentage of those redeployed or alternatively employed was 22 per cent, very few shifted to the traditional sector. They usually opted for manual labour and other jobs. The exact nature of employment in both these centres could not be ascertained from the data obtained.

The study has revealed that maintenance and repair of trawlers is undertaken during the ban period. It was observed that among the 3,400 workers unemployed, 20 per cent took care of the maintenance, repair and upkeep of crafts. This cannot be taken as a form of employment since the working arrangements were temporary and the wage rate varied.

Table 2 shows the extent of redeployment in Thrissur, Alappuzha and Malappuram districts.

It is seen form the results that Thrissur accounted for the highest redeployment rate of 45%. In Alappuzha, it was 2% and in Malappuram 0.73%. The percentage of Thrissur is aggrandised because of the data from Azhikode-Friya belt. The observations on traditional craft landings across nine centres in this belt revealed that a number of redeployed trawler workers were from Alappuzha rather than from Thrissur.

Although the percentage of redeployment of trawler workers to traditional crafts is very low, from the observations during Chakara at Puthenkadupuram (Malappuram) and Koorikuzhi (Thrissur) it was seen that three labourers out of 12 in *murtavallom* (mini trawlers) were redeployed trawler workers (making the redeployment as high as 24%). Labourers were also redeployed on large plank built crafts and small plank built crafts operating ring seines for sardine/mackerel and anchovies respectively. The crew size attached to these crafts goes up during the ban period due to this redeployment. Studies have revealed that in Cochin region 80-85 fishermen (including the fishermen on shore who help in launching the craft and who take turns to go to sea the next day) are attached to a ring seine unit during the season (Leela Edwin, 1997).

Less than 50 per cent of the respondents favoured the imposition of the ban as can be observed from Table 3. Economic and livelihood considerations tend to influence the attitude of workers towards the ban. Though this period offers a respite from the gruelling nature of the job, unless alternative employment is easy to find, there will be resistance to the imposition of the ban.

**Conclusion**

Regulations in respect of fishing activity, due to increasing discord between the traditional and mechanised sectors, led to the imposition of partial ban on trawling during the monsoon season. This ban affects nearly 30,000 labourers working in 5,000 mechanised craft. The study has shown that unemployment levels of the trawler workers are high during the ban period in two of the major fishing centres studied, Munambam and Ponnani. In Munambam, only a quarter of the total work force in trawlers is alternatively employed during this period. Labour from Colchal (Tamil Nadu) and Alappuzha, Karunagappally, Azhikode, Malankara and Paravur (Kerala) move towards home grounds in search of employment, largely in the traditional sector. In Ponnani, on the other hand, very few of redeployed/alternatively employed workers shift to the traditional sector, opting instead for manual labour and other jobs. It is seen from the results that Thrissur accounted for the highest redeployment rate followed by Alappuzha and Malappuram. It was however observed that during Chakara at Puthenkadapuram (Malappuram) and Koorikuzhi (Thrissur) at least three labourers out of 12 in *murtavallom* (mini trawlers) were redeployed trawler workers. Labourers were also redeployed on large and small plank built crafts operating ring seines for sardine/mackerel and anchovies respectively. The number of crew attached to these crafts would go up during the
Table 3: Attitude of trawler workers towards trawl ban

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Alappuzha Mean</th>
<th>Trivssur-Malappuram Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favourable to imposition of ban</td>
<td>27.7 (1.33)</td>
<td>22.03 (4.11)</td>
</tr>
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(Standard Deviation in parenthesis)

In this context, it is suggested that the government should take steps towards:

1) installation of FADs (Fish Aggregating Devices) in conducive areas;
2) Promotion of sea farming, cage culture practices, aquaculture practices etc., and
3) Encouraging allied jobs like net making and mending, engine repair and craft maintenance.

References
5. Forest department officials should take all needed steps to see that volunteers of VSS also join hands for achieving the noble objective of turtle conservation.
6. Awareness among fisher children regarding conservation can be initiated at school level itself by arranging competitions, debates, painting, poster making etc.
7. Sea Turtle Conservation messages may be disseminated among the coastal communities through plays, skits, folk songs, dramas and display of placards, and organising rallies, displaying posters etc.
8. Formation of ‘Turtle Clubs’ at village level may be taken up and the best club may be given incentives.

There was distribution of mementoes to the Resource Persons and to the Officers of the Head Office of Fisheries Department. The Workshop ended with a vote of thanks by Mr. M.A. Yakub Basha, Assistant Director of Fisheries, SIFT, Kakinada, who profusely thanked the dignitaries and other participants for making the Workshop a thumping success.

Demonstration-cum-Workshop on the Operation of TED
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12) Research on probes for identification of entry of turtles in trawl nets to be done by WII and NRSA.

13) Periodic trial netting with new designs of TED need to experimented in order to decide its efficacy.

Community based Conservation
1. SIFT should take a vital role in bringing about awareness and co-ordination among all the stake holders viz., NGOs, fisherfolk and forest department.
2. Awareness programmes should be conducted throughout the A.P. coastline in respect of conservation of turtles.
3. For popularisation of TEDs awareness at all fishing harbours of A.P. is necessary to safeguard the interests of fisherfolk.
4. Regional level Workshops may be organised to enable all concerned to develop a better understanding about conservation of sea turtles, with reference to differing fishing activities from region to region.

Import of Nile Tilapia: Ban partly lifted

It is learnt that the Government of India has lifted the ban on import of Nile Tilapia (Tilapia nilotica) in favour of Water Base Ltd and another South Indian Company. This development is interpreted in two ways: 1) These two companies will have monopoly over the production of Nile tilapia, and in all likelihood, in mono-sex form. The seed of this fish is likely to be picked up demand, once its-seed production and poly culture with shrimp or for monoculture picks up, and 2) the partial lifting of the ban may eventually prove to be providing a spread effect for the benefit of the industry.

OBITUARY

Sudden demise of S. Paul

We regret to report the sudden death of Mr. S. Paul, Senior Scientist (Retd.) of CICFRI, on the night of 28th April 2002 at Barrackpore. He was on a visit to the place to participate in a symposium at CICFRI. His sudden demise came as a great shock to the participants at the Symposium. A condolence resolution was passed and conveyed to the bereaved family.