Proceedings of the National Seminar on Riverine and Reservoir Fisheries - Challenges and Strategies, 23-24 May 2001, Cochin India,421-425.

Economic Status of the Fishermen of Malampuzha Reservoir

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This study is an attempt to bring to light the economic and social conditions of inland fishermen of Malampuzha reservoir, based on the primary data collected from a sample of 24 riverine fishermen who constitute more than 50% of the total number of fishermen in the study area. All these fishermen are members of Malampuzha SC/ST Reservoir Fisheries Cooperative Society. Data were collected by interview method using a pre-tested questionnaire. 79.17% of respondents are literate, though the literacy is largely confined to primary level (45.83%). Both agriculture and fisheries provide work during the season and most of people, both men and women, shift from one type of job to another based on season. The financial status and the living conditions of the respondents are discussed.

Key words : Economic status, reservoir fishermen, Malampuzha reservoir.

India has vast inland water resources suitable for fish production and rich fish genetic resources amenable to culture and management. The inland water resources of India comprise, about 27,300 km length of major river systems, 1.25×10^5 km length of canals, 30×10^5 ha of large and medium reservoirs, 4×10^5 ha of irrigation tanks or small reservoirs, 3×10^5 ha of beels and mans and 10×10^5 ha of ponds and tanks with area less than 10 ha and about 2.4×10^5 ha of lagoons and 14×10^5 ha of brackishwater area along the coastline (Natarajan, 1985). Reservoirs hold a tremendous promise of augmenting fish production at a comparatively low cost and provide employment to a large number of fishermen and rural folks in harvest, marketing and post-harvest activities.

Several studies exist on the economic and social status of marine fishermen. However, such studies are limited in the case of inland fishermen. This study is an attempt to bring to light the economic and social conditions of inland fishermen of Malampuzha reservoir.

Materials and Methods

This study is based on the primary data collected from 24 riverine fishermen who constitute more than 50% of the total number of fishermen in the study area. All these fishermen are members of Malampuzha SC/ST Reservoir Fisheries Co-operative Society. Data was collected by interviewing method using a pre-tested questionnaire. The information collected was tabulated, analyzed and the results are presented below.

Results and Discussion

The study area is relatively remote and socio-economically backward. Nevertheless, the literacy rate was found to be as high as in other parts of rural Kerala. As may be seen from Table 1, 79.17% of respondents were literate, though the literacy is largely confined to primary level (45.83%). Roy (1985) concluded that literacy levels, as defined by the ability to read and write, are reasonably high, but few have any formal education. General opinion of the communities is that education does not really help, except, perhaps in getting a government job. They also believe that high education status alienates and makes the individuals, indifferent and useless within the community. The members of the community feel that there is need for an educational system that would impart them enabling skills in their chosen profession and in areas such as management and accounting.

There is a high degree of under employment among the fishermen. Even at this level of under-employment, the families have a high dependency ratio of 55%. The dependency ratio does not have a definable relation with the educational level of the respondents. The scope for gainful employment in reservoir fisheries of Malampuzha is limited to roughly two months a year, i.e., during the monsoon months of June and July. Table 2 reveals that all the respondents except three have only 60 days of work in inland fisheries. The per capita annual income from fisheries range from a mere Rs. 2,100/- to Rs. 47,250/-. One-fifth of the fishermen reported an income exceeding Rs. 20,000 per year. Nearly one-third of the fishermen reported annual earnings of less than Rs. 10,000/-. This range of variation in earnings indicates unreliability of fishing as a dependable occupation.

Agricultural labour and general labour are the two other occupations that these fishermen take for the purpose of gainful employment. Both these activities provide more working days and earnings than does the fisheries. It appears that fishing is only a minor activity, compared to other economic activities. Women seem to have more working days in agriculture and other areas, than do men. From the point of view of the sources of income, inland fisheries provide only 28% of the family income. Agriculture labour provide 37% of the family income, followed by general labour (21%) and these together provide more than 50% of the annual income, in the study area. Incidentally 14% of the annual income comes from services. This 14% of the

Table 1 : Educational profile of inland fishermen

	Illiterate	Primary School	Middle School	High School	Literate	Total
N	5	11	4	4	19	24
%	(20.83%)	(45.83%)	(16.67%)	(16.67)	(79.17%)	(100%)

Table 2: Work profile of inland fishermen

Sl. No.	Sex	Occupational pattern								Total Family Income (Rs.yr^{-1})
		Agriculture labour		General labour		Fishing		Service		
		Working days. yr^{-1}	Income (Rs.yr^{-1})	Working days. yr^{-1}	Income (Rs.yr^{-1})	Working days. yr^{-1}	Income (Rs.yr^{-1})	Working days. yr^{-1}	Income (Rs.yr^{-1})	
1.	Male	48	4800	-	-	60	4500	-	-	18900
	Female	192	9600	-	-	-	-	-	-	
2.	Male	-	-	-	-	300	7200	-	-	19200
	Female	240	12000	-	-	-	-	-	-	
3.	Male	-	-	240	24000	60	12000	-	-	48000
	Female	-	-	240	12000	-	-	-	-	
4.	Male	-	-	144	21600	60	47250	-	-	78450
	Female	192	9600	-	-	-	-	-	-	
5.	Male	288	28800	-	-	60	15750	-	-	54150
	Female	-	-	192	9600	-		-	-	
6.	Male	-	-	240	24000	60	12000	-	-	45600
	Female	192	9600	-	-	-	-	-	-	
7.	Male	-	-	240	24000	60	39375	-	-	63375
	Female	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
8.	Male	-	-	-	-	300	20800	-	-	44800
	Female	240	2400	-	-	-	-	-	-	
9.	Male	240	16800	-	-	-	-	-	-	57225
	Female	240	16800	-	-	60	23625	-	-	
10.	Male	240	16800	-	-	60	6000	-	-	22800
	Female	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
11.	Male	-	-	-	-	-	-	360	42720	42720
	Female	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
12.	Male	192	13440	-	-	-	-	-	-	13440
	Female	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
13.	Male	-	-	192	19200	-	-	-	-	19200
	Female	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
14.	Male	-	-	-	-	360	23000	-	-	23000
	Female	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
15.	Male	-	-	-	-	60	9000	300	24000	33000
	Female	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
16.	Male	192	15360	-	-	60	6000	-	-	23760
	Female	60	2400	-	-	-	-	-	-	
17.	Male	-	-		-	-	-	240	19200	22800
	Female	-	-	-		-	-	144	3600	
18.	Male	192	19200	-	-	60	2100	-	-	28980
	Female	192	7680	-	-	-	-	-	-	
19.	Male	192	19200	-	-	-	-	-	-	28110
	Female	144	5760	-	-	-	-	-	-	
20.	Male	-	-	300	45000	60	3150	-	-	48150
	Female	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
21.	Male	300	30000	-	-	-	-	-	-	45000
	Female	300	15000	-	-	-	-	-	-	
22.	Male	144	14400	-	-	60	4000	-	-	18400
	Female	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
23.	Male	144	14400	-	-	-	-	-	-	14400
	Female	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
24.	Male	-	-	-	-	-	-	360	28800	28800
	Female	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	

total income accrues to a handful of people employed in lower grade Govt. Service. It should be noted that most people, both men and women, shift from one type of job to another based on season. Both agriculture and fisheries provide work during the season. When the season is over, people shift to general labour, wherever available.

The income-expenditure balance of the 24 households covered under the study, is shown in Table 3. The families are extremely conservative in their household expenditure. The maximum household expenditure is Rs. 31,010/-. There were families that survived with an annual expenditure of less than Rs. 10,000/-. All the families showed a surplus of income over expenditure. Food expenditure constitute 60 to 80% of the household expenditure. It is also noteworthy that the costly food items such as meat is not consumed widely. Milk and fish make the quality component of the food.

All the respondents were members of the Co-operative Society and the study shows that they were also active in the banking transactions. Marriage, house construction, acquisition of milch animals, cycles and fishing equipments constitute the major purposes for which bank loans are availed. It can also be seen from this study that more than half of the respondents possessed *kachcha* house and radio and some of them possessed boat, net and engine (in groups), bicycle, television (black & white), cow, furniture, newspaper and land. 4.17% of the households possessed colour television, telephone, motorcycle and other bi-wheelers. This is an important indication of progressiveness of the fishermen of this locality. D'Cruz (1995) reported that the formulation of a course of action with the understanding of previous history and with the better awareness of specific needs and aspirations of the sector is essential for the upward social mobility of the artisanal fisherfolk, who belong to the lowest strata of the society.

Table 3 : Income-expenditure balance of households

Sl. No.	Annual income (Rs.)	Annual expenditure (Rs.)	Deficit/ Surplus (Rs.)
1	18900	9620	9280
2	19200	15274	3926
3	48000	9978	38022
4	78450	9114	69336
5	54150	12060	42090
6	45600	10370	35230
7	63375	25340	38035
8	44800	30270	14530
9	57225	15100	42125
10	22800	14560	6240
11	42720	11310	31410
12	13440	8570	4870
13	19200	6480	12720
14	23000	7620	15380
15	33000	31010	1990
16	23760	6750	17010
17	22800	15900	6900
18	28980	8820	20160
19	28110	12238	15872
20	48150	5650	42500
21	45000	21740	23260
22	18400	16380	2020
23	14400	13400	1000
24	28800	22340	6460

Author is thankful to Dr. K. Devadasan, Director, CIFT for granting permission to publish this paper. He is also thankful to Shri. K.D. Santhosh and Smt. Tessy Rony, Technical Assistants, for the help rendered in conducting the study.

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