

Rapid Situation Analysis of the Artisanal Fisher Folk

Brief Report

Background

Global spread of COVID-19, a variety of Corona Virus, has been declared as pandemic by World health Organization. Since the first official case of COVID-19 declared by China on 31st December 2019¹ has now been infected over 5 million people leaving around 330,000 people dead on 21st May 2020². The virus affected the life of people around the world and changed their lifestyle drastically with governments imposing lockdown in most of the countries. However, such measures are having significant impacts on jobs, livelihoods, food and nutrition security, gender equality, and potential social unrest³.

Bangladesh, having recognized its first COVID-19 case on 8 March 2020, currently infected 28,511 people while 408 COVID-19 patients had been reported as died on 21st May 2020⁴. The government imposed national holiday and lockdown in different areas from 26th March 2020. People are instructed to stay at home and maintain social distancing. This strange situation left a lot of people especially of low income level jobless. The situation is expected to be more deteriorating in coming days as the number of COVID-19 infected people is rocketing day by day.

Marine fisheries, like other labor intensified sectors, had also been damaged due to the pandemic. There had been some sort of confusion among the people and also the law enforcers which led some of the fishermen as restricted to go fishing while the others went to sea. But the market and the distribution system had been interrupted and due to restriction on movement of people. Generally, the artisanal fishermen are mostly poor and survey data (collected a year ago) for Sector Wide Impact Assessment (SWIA) (unpublished) by the Sustainable Oceans project shows that 35% of the respondents at Patharghata and Moheshkhali (two of the most important sea fish landing stations) sub-districts had income of less than USD 2.5 per family per day. Amidst this sufferings and economic crisis 65 days ban on marine fishing had been imposed from 20th May 2020. Last year's ban on marine fishing resulted in huge financial crisis for the poor fishermen and this year the situation is expected to be worse amidst this pandemic which demands intensive advocacy for the livelihood and dignity of the poor fishermen. In the meanwhile, the coastline of Bangladesh has been devastated by the Super Cyclone 'Amphan' on 20th May 2020 which added to the sufferings of the fisher folk community and the industry as a whole.

Advocacy initiatives, though, are very difficult during this situation as it requires information and evidence to bargain with. As the project has information on the fishermen of the two project areas collected a year ago, it would be easier to compare the information if a rapid survey (through telephone communication) can be designed on a few key questions which will give a clear idea of the changed reality of the fishermen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Designing

¹Source: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>, sighted on 21 May 2020 at 3:24 pm

²Source: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>, sighted on 21 May at 3:24 pm

³Source: <https://www.worldfishcenter.org/pages/covid-19/>, sighted on 21 May at 3:30 pm

⁴Source: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>, sighted on 21 May at 4:00 pm

advocacy strategy (organizing webinar, dialogue, press conference, media campaign, infographic etc.) will also be possible based on the comparative finding.

Objectives

Major objective of the situation analysis was to get a clear idea of the socio-economic condition of the fisher folk community of the project locations of the Sustainable Oceans project during COVID-19 period.

Specific objectives of this rapid situation analysis are to

- Identify the impact of 65 days ban and COVID 19 on their livelihood situation, including change in income of the fishermen during this pandemic period,
- Assess fishermen's access to social safety nets during 65 days ban and Covid 19-related restrictions on fishing
- Get an idea regarding the consciousness of the fishermen on Corona Virus pandemic, and assess whether they have access to information from health authorities?
- See the change in health situation during COVID-19 period and assess access to treatment facilities
- Learn about coping mechanism of the fishermen during the pandemic period

Methodology

Data collected from the fishermen through telephone conversation. A brief checklist had been developed for data collection which was finalized upon successful pre-testing. An online form was developed for data entry. Following were the step-by-step process of the survey:

- Twenty Volunteers (ten from each of the sub-districts) were trained on the checklist and data collection method who made phone calls to the fishermen and collected data
- Randomly selected 1018 respondents (519 from Barguna and 499 from Cox's Bazar) were interviewed
- Two Data Entry Operators (one from each sub-district) entered the data in the online data form
- Two supervisors (one from each sub-district) ensured the quality of data collection and data entry
- Bangladesh focal person for the Sustainable Oceans project analyzed the data

Major Finding

Demographic information:

- Data collected from 1018 respondents where
 - 519 were from Patharghata Sub-district of Barguna district
 - 499 were from Moheshkhali Sub-district of Cox's Bazar district
- Among the respondents 306 (30.1%) are female while 712 (69.9%) are male. All of the respondents are related with coastal artisanal fishing. The female are member of households where fishing is the main source of income of the household.
- 47.5% of the respondents had been interviewed last year, as part of Sector Wide Impact Assessment (SWIA)

- Majority, 65.8% (670) of the respondents are fishermen while 30.1% (306) are housewives. Among the rest of the respondents 2.85% (29) are Captains while the others remained in the categories of Boat Owner, Dock Labour, Ice Factory Worker and Warehouse Owners.
- All of the female respondents were housewife as they are not allowed in the sea bound fishing boats.
- Average monthly income of the respondents (before the COVID outbreak) shows that 56.97% (580) had monthly income between BDT 5,001 – 10,000 while 29.37% (299) had income between BDT 10,001 – 15,000 per month. 7.76% (79) respondents had income up to BDT 5,000 per month. 5.5% (56) had income between BDT 15,001 – 20,000 while 3 of the respondents had income within the range of BDT 20,001 – 30,000 and only one respondent had income of BDT 10,000,000 (Boat Owner).
- Data shows that 64.93% (661) respondents belong to household size of 2 – 5 members while 33.89% (345) belong to household size of 6 – 10 members. 12 household were found with members between 11 and 14.
- Age of the respondents varied from 18 years to 75 years. 34.6% of the respondents belong to age group of 31 – 40 years while 27.2% and 23% belonged to age groups 41 – 50 and 21 – 30 years respectively.

Impact of COVID 19 (before the imposition of 65 days ban)

- Fishing was banned in 4 Unions of Patharghata Sub-district while the fishermen went for fishing in the other unions of the study area.
- 84.3% of the respondents opined that their income reduced during the COVID 19 period (before the imposition of 65 days ban) while 15.1% said that there had not been any change in their income
- 39 of the respondents did not have any income during the COVID 19 (before the imposition of 65 days ban). Following chart shows the average income of the respondents during COVID 19, before the imposition of 65 days ban.

| Income during COVID 19 (before the imposition of 65 days ban) | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-------------|--------------|
| 0 | 39 | 3.83 |
| 200 - 500 | 11 | 1.08 |
| 800 - 1000 | 83 | 8.15 |
| 1001 - 2000 | 136 | 13.36 |
| 2001 - 3000 | 137 | 13.46 |
| 3001 - 4000 | 114 | 11.20 |
| 4001 - 5000 | 114 | 11.20 |
| 5001 - 6000 | 110 | 10.81 |
| 6001 - 8000 | 181 | 17.78 |
| 8001 - 10000 | 64 | 6.29 |
| 10001 - 20000 | 28 | 2.75 |
| 400000 | 1 | 0.10 |
| Total | 1018 | 100.0 |

- Though fishing was not banned in most of the areas, no respondent reported to have more income during this period. 111 of them said that their income did not change. Change of income during the COVID 19 period, before the imposition of 65 days ban is projected through the following table:

| Loss of income in Percentage during COVID 19, before the imposition of 65 days ban | Frequency | Percent |
|---|------------------|----------------|
| No change | 111 | 10.90 |
| 1 - 20% | 35 | 3 |
| 21 - 40% | 195 | 19 |
| 41 - 60% | 259 | 25 |
| 61 - 80% | 249 | 24 |
| 81 - 100% | 169 | 17 |
| Total | 1018 | 100.0 |

- 74.4% of the respondents did not get any support during COVID 19 period (before the imposition of 65 days ban)
- 48% of the respondents (who got support) received support from the Ministry of Disaster and Relief while 21%, 18% and 12% of the respondents received support from the government, Union Parishad and NGOs respectively
- The respondents reported that they did not have to pay any type of bribe to get the supports
- 99% of the respondents (who received any type of support) said that the support was inadequate comparing to their needs
- 83.2% of the respondents managed the deficit by taking loan from various sources while 43% had to go for other options along with taking loans like alternative livelihood; curtailing food, treatment and education cost. 14.1% had to take alternative livelihoods option to survive.
- They took the loans from the money relatives (49.6%), lenders (23.5%), NGOs (4.9%) etc. Most of the respondents took loan from more than one source.
- They stated that they had been planning to repay the loan by working and fishing later on.
- Only 3.8% of the respondents informed that they knew of any COVID patient in their area and the patients were locally infected
- The COVID patients got health support including expenses for their treatment from the government health facilities (government hospitals and Upazila (Sub-district) Health Complexes. But they required other supports than health support to bear the daily expenses
- Neighbors of the COVID patients did not behave well (did not want to mix with them and support them) with them while they got supportive

65 days ban on marine fishing

- 65 days ban had been imposed in the survey area. In Cox's Bazar, the ban was monitored mainly by the Coast Guard while in Barguna, it was Coast Guard along with

the Fisheries Office, Naval police, Navy and Upazila Administration. 95.3% of the respondents did not go for fishing during the ban period

- Around 35% of the Barguna respondents said that they had been fishing despite the ban while the Moheshkhali respondents said that they are abiding by the government imposed ban
- 37.7% of the respondents did not have any livelihood option during the ban period while 32.8% were engaged as day labor and 16.5% were engaged in mending boat and net. The others took different livelihoods options like pulling rickshaw, agriculture, catching crabs, dairy, poultry, domestic help, sewing etc.
- 32.8% of the respondents had no income during the ban period while the rest of them had monthly income of BDT. 3208 on an average.
- 32.8% of the respondents suffered 100% loss in their income during the 65 days ban. Scenario of the loss of income of the respondents during the 65 days ban is projected through the following table:

| Loss of income in percent during 65 day ban | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-------------|--------------|
| 0 | 2 | .2 |
| 1 - 20% | 17 | 2 |
| 21 - 40% | 124 | 12 |
| 41 - 60% | 226 | 22 |
| 61 - 80% | 267 | 26 |
| 81 - 100% | 382 | 38 |
| Total | 1018 | 100.0 |

- 86% of the respondents informed that they received food (rice) and cash support during the 65 days ban period. The rice support varied from 10 Kg to 80 Kg while 80% of them got 50 – 57 Kg of rice. Some of them got rice support from other sources as well. Only two respondents claimed of receiving cash support (BDT 1500 and 2500) other than rice.
- Most of the 11.7% of the respondents who did not get any support due to not having Fisher Card. A few of them had problem with the Union Parishad members or Chairmen
- 86.7% of the respondents have Fisher Card
- 66.2% of the respondents did not know their entitlements as support from the Union Parishad while 33.5% knew their entitlements. 57% of the respondents who knew their entitlements claimed that they did not get as per they were entitled to get and blamed the Union Parishad for not getting right amount of rice
- 87.4% of the respondents had to take loans to meet their regular expenses during the 65 days ban period. 39.6% depended on only taking loan while the others had to cope with other mechanisms along with taking loan
- 54.8% of the respondents took loan from their neighbors while 34.8% of the respondents took loan from the money lenders. The respondents took loan from other sources as well like relatives, NGOs etc. 66.8% of the respondents took loan from more than one sources.

- The respondents stated that they had been planning to repay the loans by working afterwards.

Awareness on COVID-19 and access to health information

- 99% of the respondents admitted that they had been sensitized regarding COVID 19 from different sources like Union Parishad, media and neighbors. The Union Parishad and different government departments arranged for massive campaign through miking that raise the awareness among the respondents
- 68.4% of the respondents know fairly well regarding COVID 19 while 26.1%, 3.5% and 2% respondents' awareness was judged as good, a little and very good respectively
- All of the respondents take protective measures like mask, gloves etc. There is availability of Protective equipment in the study area and the respondents had to buy them personally

Change in health situation during COVID-19:

- 56.7% of the respondents opined that they have seen no significant change in the health situation in their neighborhood.
- Among the 43.3% of the respondents who experienced change, stated that they can observe the change in the forms of keeping their environment clean; maintaining health hygiene; maintaining social distance; restricted mobility etc.
- 14.3% of the respondents opined that the health service in the Upazila (Sub-district) Health Complex improved during the COVID period
- 89.9% of the respondents informed that they had not faced any difficulty in getting health service during the COVID period. However, 4.4% informed that they had not been able to avail with any health service during this period.

Change in Gender Based Violence during COVID-19 and 65 days ban period:

- 78% of the female respondents admitted that they had heard about domestic violence in their neighborhood but the intensity is "once in a while" (73%) while 19% of the female respondents informed that the intensity is "very rare".
- 79.8% of the female respondents recognized Economic violence as the major form of domestic violence while 49.1% recognized incidents of physical violence. Recognition of mental torture and sexual torture had been recognized by 7.2% and 1.3% respectively
- However, 62% of the female respondents admitted that the situation regarding domestic violence had been worse during the COVID and 65 days ban period comparing to other periods
- Poverty had been identified as the major cause of increasing domestic violence. They also identified other reasons like bad influence of in-laws; dowry; extra marital affairs; giving birth to girl children; helplessness of women; superstition; habitual patriarchal practice etc.
- 94% of the female respondents informed that they did not see any attempt to reduce domestic violence in their community
- 10% of the female respondents admitted that they had heard of child marriage in their neighborhood during this COVID-19 or 65 days ban period. They recognized poverty

as the prime reason of these child marriages while they also identified lack of awareness and education as some of other reasons of child marriages

- 85% of the female respondents aid that they did not see any attempt of preventing child marriage in their community. However, they identified the Child Marriage Prevention Committee and the prime force to stop child marriage in their locality
- Only 27.4% of the female respondents admitted that there heard of case of rape/murder of women/girl in their area during COVID-19 or 65 days ban period

Impact of previous year's 65 days ban

- 96.4% of the respondents admitted that they have seen change in the marine fish stock after last year's 65 ban
- 76.9% of the respondents said that marine fish stock increased after last year's 65 days ban while 51.8% opined that they could catch more fish after the ban had been imposed last year
- However, 6.6% of the respondents opined that marine fish stock decreased due to last year's ban. Mainly, these respondents are from Patharghata
- 99.6% of the respondents from Moheshkhali admitted that their income increased as a result of last year's 65 days ban while on the other hand, 64% of the respondents from Patharghata did not agree to it
- Increase in marine fish stock and volume of catch are the major reasons behind the increase of their income, as identified by the respondents.
- However, a large portion of respondents from Patharghata complained that the Indian Trawlers continued getting inside the Bangladesh territory and continued fishing during the 65 days ban imposed in Bangladesh while the ban for Indian Territory was in a different time period and as a result, the fishermen from Patharghata were deprived from a huge volume of fish. Other major reason for decreasing income by the respondents of Patharghata was identified as low price of fish