



Short Communication

Impact of COVID-19 on fisheries and fishermen of Khejuri-II block in Purba Medinipur district, West Bengal, India

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Abstract

In the Khejuri-II block, situated in the Purba Medinipur district, 40% of the people are engaged in fishery. In this locality, people cultivate fish and shrimp hugely. Fishermen in this area earn money from foreign countries by exporting fish and shrimp. But unfortunately, during COVID-19, the fisheries in this area faced huge losses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the fish and shrimp production of Khejuri-II block was 60-65% less than in 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019. The COVID-19 pandemic have affected other fish-allied activities like net mending, and regular maintenance of boats and engines. This also causes huge damage to high-cost assets like fishing crafts and gears.

Keywords: Fishermen, COVID-19, Fish, Shrimp.

Introduction

The fisheries sector could become a key sector for India's food and nutrition security¹. More than 9 million people directly depend on fishing for their livelihood, 80% of whom are small-scale fishers². Fisheries and aquaculture provide nutritious food for hundreds of millions of people worldwide and provide a livelihood for more than 10% of the world's population³. A global pandemic is an accidental shock to entire economies and healthcare system. It has disrupted demand and supply chains in all sectors of the economy including fisheries. It has huge impact on fish and fishery products which has directly affected 14.5 million people associated with the fishing industry. Khejuri is a backward region in the Purba Medinipur district in the Indian state of West Bengal. 40% of the people of Khejuri-II block are associated with fish and shrimp farming. Fishermen in this area earn money from the cultivation of fish and shrimp.

Materials and Methods

The present study was done in Khejuri-II block in Purba Medinipur district, West Bengal during the COVID-19 pandemic from September 2020 to December 2021. Data were collected through interviews from 110 fishermen. The questionnaire become prepared for the gathering of relevant information and facts in accordance with the study goal. Data was gathered using a descriptive research design and structured survey questionnaires distributed to fishermen.

After the information was collected, it was examined, updated, and added to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Microsoft Excel was used to perform the preliminary analysis, which included graphs and descriptive statistics.

Results and Discussion

Fish is one of the most important nutritious segments of the global food chain and an important source of employability for the rural coastal population. Fish and fishery products are among the most traded food products in the world, accounting for 38% of international trade (FAO, 2020). Reduced consumer demand, reduced supply, and supply chain disruptions directly affect those working in the industry including fishermen, fish processors, fish sellers, suppliers, and transport workers. The corona outbreak disrupts fishing activities and supplies in multiple aspects such as harvesting, processing, sourcing, and marketing. March to June is the peak season for fish and shrimp farming, hampered by the lack of access to migrant workers. Shortages of fish species, fertilizers, and other inputs can also affect desired production levels. In the Khejuri-II block, the fish and shrimp production was 40-45% less than in 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has impacted the livelihood and daily income of fishermen in the Khejuri-II block. All the farmers in Khejuri-II block areas who were involved in fish and shrimp farming had difficulty importing the materials required for fish and shrimp farming due to COVID-19 and the fish and shrimp farming suffered huge losses.

Conclusion

The fisheries sector has become an important sector that not only provides livelihood for fishermen and provides employment for large segments of society but also food security and valuable foreign exchange income for the nation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the fishery in the Khejuri-II block area is severely disrupted. Every aspect of the fish supply chain has

been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, putting jobs, income, and food security at risk.

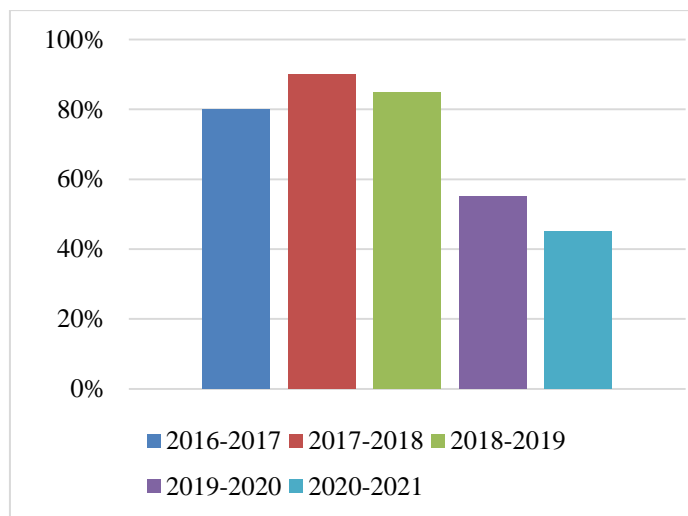


Figure-1: Fish and shrimp production of Khejuri-II block during 2016-2021

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