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INDIAN FISHERIES PERSPECTIVE

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With 2.02 million sq. km. of sea in its EEZ, more than 27,000 km of rivers, about 1,13,000 km of canals, 1.75 million ha. of identified water spread in the form of reservoirs, over a million ha. in the form of tanks and ponds and approximately 0.6 million ha. of stagnant derelict water-spread, India portends with considerable scope for development of fisheries, both capture and culture. There are about one and a half million fishermen, actively engaged in fishing who support about 6 million people of fishermen community for their livelihood. With the present fish production of 2.80 million tonnes (1984) India contributes to a little over 3% of the world fish production of about 76 million tonnes. India's contribution is highest in the Indian Ocean fishery. The annual growth of fish production has been in the order of 7% during the last couple of years as against 3.1% during the base of the last plan. The per capita consumption of fish in India is about 3.6 kg/annum while the world average figure is about 12.5 kg/annum. The level recommended by the Nutrition Advisory Committee on Human Nutrition stands at 31 kg/annum.

Fish production in India has been fluctuating from 2.4 to 2.6 million tonnes until 1983. For the first time, the production level crossed this barrier and reached 2.80 million tonnes in 1984. This has been an increase of 12% over the previous year's production.

Against the Sixth Plan target of 220 crores of fish seed production, the actual production has reached 542 crores, 2½ times of the target set. Another achievement has been that the area brought under organised fish culture has increased by more than 200% over the previous year.

By its 3% contribution to the world fish production of about 76 million tonnes, India ranks 7th among fish producing countries of the world. By 2000 AD the world fish production is expected to be around 100 million tonnes of which it should be possible for India to contribute to the order of 5 to 6%. For increasing the per capita consumption the target of fish production by the turn of the century is envisaged at 5 million tonnes comprising about 3 million tonnes from the sea and 2 million tonnes from the inland sector. Similarly the export earning from marine products envisaged for 2000 AD is about Rs. 1000 crores as against the present value of Rs. 386 crores.

The fish production increased from 23.40 lakhs tonnes in 1979-80 to 28.59 lakhs tonnes by 1985 showing a growth rate of 3.1% per annum during the 6th Plan. During the same period the inland fish production has increased from 8.48 lakh tonnes to over 11 lakh tonnes by 1985. Similarly the marine fish production has gone up from 14.92 lakh tonnes during the same period to about 18 lakh tonnes. At present we are harvesting about one-third of our EEZ potential. Even this quantity comes largely from coastal waters extending to about 70 m depth. About 99% of our total marine catch is confined to 15-20% of our EEZ. Much of the future additional landings would necessarily come from off-shore and deep sea areas. Non-exploitation of these perishable resources in deep sea areas would result in a complete loss to the country.

The number of Fish Farmers Development Agencies (FFDA) in the country with central assistance stood at 147 nos. at the end of 1984-85. Eighteen new districts were covered under the scheme during 1984-85. About 1.30 lakh hectares of water area had been brought under production through FFDA's by the end of Sixth Plan. The number of fish farmers trained under the scheme is about 51,000 at the end of last plan. The productivity has also reached the level of 800 kg/hectare through this scheme. India is one of those fortunate countries to have fabulous brackish-water resources. The prime marine species of prawn is highly suitable for brackishwater farming. Brackishwater fish farming to a considerable scale is being carried out only in few States such as West Bengal, Kerala, Karnataka and Goa. Brackish water fishery potential is expedient not only to project the curve of national fish production upwards but also to meet the demands of high exchange export market of shrimps.

The main thrust in the marine sector will be an extended exploitation of EEZ by promotion of investment in deep sea fishing. By and large the resources beyond the 40 fathom depth remain unexploited. The new fishing grounds and new resources which have been discovered during the recent past by the Fishery Survey of India in the deeper waters are expected to be intensively harvested by the deep sea fishing sector. The potentially rich grounds for deep sea lobster and deep sea prawn, squids and cuttle fishes, perches, baracudas, mackerel etc. have been located through survey by the Fishery Survey of India (FSI) along the West Coast, South Coast, Gulf of Mannar and East Coast. Potentially rich resources for yellowfin tuna within the EEZ have also been located off Karnataka coast and along the East Coast from September to March. For encouraging deep sea fishing in the country, the Department has recommended a total loan of Rs. 56.21 crores for acquisition of fishing vessels and a subsidy of Rs. 15.19 crores to the indigenous shipyards during the year 1985. The target for the 7th Plan is 300 deep sea fishing trawlers.

In the traditional sector which is the mainstay of the marine sector, it is planned to mechanise 12,500 craft with outboard (DBH) engine during the 7th Plan. This would enable the traditional fishermen to expand the range of

operation and to diversify the fishing methods and thereby increasing the catch besides easing physical strain on them. In addition to this, introduction of organised scheme under the self-financing arrangement, bank financing facility etc. would continue. By the end of the 7th Plan, it is expected that there would be more than 30,000 mechanised craft as against the present 20,000. Realising the need for providing appropriate landing and berthing facilities the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation has sanctioned a total of 131 fishing harbour schemes consisting of 5 major and 26 minor harbours and 100 small landing centres since the 4th Five Year Plan period. The majority of these harbours and landing centres are in full working condition.

One area which received the focal attention during the current plan is the welfare of fishermen. The Government have introduced a Group Accident Insurance Scheme for active fishermen which covers both the inland and marine sectors. More than 5 lakh fishermen have been covered under the scheme during the year. To mitigate the plight of the poor fishermen a Fund known as the National Welfare Fund for the Fishermen was established during 1984-85. The Fund is expected to play a key role in promoting housing scheme, protected water supply, in the area of health, hygiene, recreation, education etc. in selected fishermen villages of the States besides providing old age pension to the elderly and widows.

The targeted fish production by 2000 AD and beyond is planned to be achieved by scientific utilisation and exploitation of the capture and culture fishery resources in the inland sector. Bulk of the production is to be raised from intensive culture fisheries operation in tanks, ponds, reservoirs, brackish water farms. This calls for a number of measures such as proper land use policy, relaxation of land ceilings in suitable areas, introduction of high technology in selected areas, introduction of appropriate post harvest technology including intensive marketing. It is perhaps possible that a sizeable portion of the domestic fish requirement could be met from fresh water fish production especially in the land locked provinces. Inclusion of biotechnology such as use of bacteria for cleaning of effluents, algal culture in oxidation ponds, composting of domestic waste through biogas technology for use in aquaculture for manure and feed, recycling and land and water management would open avenues for low input high productivity oriented aquaculture technologies. The scope to modernise fisheries sector through support of the country's plastic industries, engineering and electronic sector including remote sensing technology through satellite, use of refrigeration system and effective co-ordination with the related sectors such as agriculture, irrigation, power, meteorology etc. would be attended to.