

## The story of Vaniakudy Transportation: A Problem for Fish Vendors

**I**T WAS an unbearable scene. Arulamma, a fish vendor, was pleading with the bus conductor to allow her to board the bus with a basketful of fish. The conductor was unmoved and left her where she was. Provoked by the inhuman attitude of the conductor, the vendor started abusing and cursing him and his family,

Understandably, this is a common scene that one could find whenever fish vendors try to get into buses. They are often denied access to a bus, and even if they are permitted to get into one, the public is often hostile. There are instances of vendors being pushed out of a bus along with their fish.

The plight of the female fish vendors in Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu is pathetic. There are more than 1,500 such fish vendors in the district, most of whom are drawn from a very poor socio-economic background. They resort to fish vending for their very survival.

Santhidan, a non-governmental organization engaged in organizing fish vendors in the district, helps them to have easy access to credit, educates them for better handling of the trade, and lobbies with the Government for

their access to public transport. Though the district authorities have permitted the vendors to use public transport, in practice it is very difficult for them to get into a bus.

One of the consequences the women face is their inability to reach the market in time, because of which a good number of women incur a loss.

Vaniakudy is one of the villages where fish vendors face this problem. There are more than 100 fish vendors who go to different markets spread over a 30-kilometre radius. Some carry the fish on their head and cater to the needs of the nearby rural population; other go to urban and semi-urban markets. The vendors who go to the urban and semi-urban markets depend on public transport. Uncertainty is their everyday ordeal, and economic hardships are a regular occurrence.

While we were discussing the problem with the Sangam members of this village, the women told us about all the hardships they faced every day. One woman even wept at the meeting when she recounted the ill-treatment meted out to her by a bus conductor while she was trying to get into his bus. Several meetings and discus-

sions helped us to identify their problems and the real need for hiring transport. They were ready to spend some of their time for this van arrangement and to collect the necessary money. They also fixed the time schedule, the number of vendors who would participate, the rent for the van, etc.

### **ODA - PHEP's offer**

This enthusiastic initiative and interest prompted Santhidan to have a discussion with the Overseas Development Administration's Post-Harvest Fisheries Project (ODA-PHFP) regarding the van hire system. Soon after, Ms. Kamila, ODA-PHFP Women in Development Officer, came to Santhidan, visited the target village and held discussions with the women fish vendors. Based on the visit and the interest evinced, ODA-PHFP welcomed this system and offered to support an experimental study at Enayam village.

However, for various reasons, we could not try the experiment at Enayam. At the same time, Vaniakudy had a demand for a van hire system because of a large catch and dry fish processing. Every Saturday they used to take the dry fish to the Vadasery market, which is one of the big markets in Nagercoil.

At Vaniakudy, the van hiring system started on July 16, 1994. Initially, the experiment worked for 29 days only because of the low level of fish catch. (Generally in Kanyakumari District, the sea is now rough and the fishermen are advised not to go fishing.) Based on the initial experience, the number of fish vendors using the van increased day by day. There were of course quarrels among them regarding the place to keep their vessels.

Everyday, early in the morning, the fish vendors go to the seashore to buy the fish immediately after the landing of the catch. From 8.30 to 9.00 a.m., the van waits for them; those vendors who can easily sell the fish in the market buy it initially for more money, while the second and third-grade fish vendors wait for some more time to buy the fish at a lower rate. Initially both the parties had a big quarrel among themselves; later they understood the strength of cooperation **and** went together as one group.

Two local leaders were identified among the group and they took the responsibility for collecting the money and maintaining the members' list. In the absence of one, another woman automatically took over the leadership. They had a discussion among themselves and fixed the van hire charge. From Vaniyakudy to Monday Market it is Rs. 7, and to Nagercoil Rs. 10. For additional luggage, the charge is Rs. 5. After their arrival at the destination, the leader hands over the money and the members' list to the person who maintains the accounts. The van is hired for Rs. 140, and the rent is fixed for all the days. For 20 days the gain and loss were borne by the Sangam, but now the members are asked to share the loss and gain themselves - an arrangement that has been duly accepted by them.

When at any time there are more fish vendors to be transported, they hire another van to go to the market, especially on Saturdays and at times of large catches. The vendors have

agreed among themselves on the seating arrangement in the van; with adequate space for their containers.

If there is a flood of fish catches, we can expect to reap the full benefits of this system and the van can be remodelled to suit the convenience of the fish vendors. Through the system

even as it exists now, we have been able to reduce the stress and strain of the fish vendors and help them with better marketing arrangements.

Ms. **VANAJA**  
**Santhidan, Nagercoil**  
**Tamil Nadu**

## From the Editor . . .

1995 sees the first edition of PHF NEWS. This is a publication of the Overseas Development Administration's Bay of Bengal Post-Harvest Fisheries Project (ODA-PHFP). The project is based in Madras and operates in the coastal states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

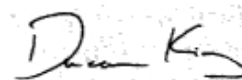
The project aims at improving the living and working conditions of fishermen and women in coastal communities through developing appropriate strategies in the post-harvest small-scale sector. The specific outputs to achieve this are:

- to strengthen the effectiveness of the fishing communities, non-governmental and governmental organizations to develop needs-related skills in post-harvest fisheries.
- to increase the ability of the target group and organizations to **address** post-harvest issues through a greater understanding of the technical and marketing aspects.
- to strengthen the ability of these organizations to assist target groups in community issues related to post-harvest fisheries.

This newsletter is seen as a very important means of disseminating and sharing information to inform other workers and organizations in this field, and to increase the impact at the community level. The target audience for this newsletter are the staff of organizations and development institutions working in fishing communities on post-harvest aspects in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Therefore, this newsletter will develop into a powerful communication tool for people working with, and belonging to, coastal communities in the post-harvest sector to gain information, share experiences and generally to keep in touch with developments, both within this region and also outside.

In order for this to take place, we must have a free flow of information between all parties, and I request that you start to put pen to paper and write to us. I am pleased that in this first edition there are two articles from an NGO, Santhidan. One is on the problems of women fish vendors trying to get to the market, a problem that is commonly encountered throughout India. The other is on understanding the sociological and cultural issues that are involved in dealing with fishing communities: issues that must be considered before implementation of any project activity takes place,

The format of this newsletter will develop as the ODA-PHFP receives feedback from you, the readers. Please write to us and express your views on the content and design.



DUNCAN KING  
*Project Field*

# Post-Harvest Fisheries Workshop Held at Bhubaneswar

**P**RESENTLY in India, the Overseas Development Administration Post-Harvest Fisheries Project (ODA-PHFP) has activities in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh implemented by selected NGOs, and it will shortly be extending its activities in Orissa. A workshop was Organized at Bhubaneswar on September 21-22, 1994 with the participation of officials of the Department of Fisheries, Orissa Government; the Chief Executives of NGOs; representative fisherfolk from the areas where the NGOs are presently working; and officers of the PHFP.

The main aims of the workshop were:

1. To present the role that PHFP undertakes in post-harvest fisheries.
2. To discuss the 'needs' of the fisherfolk, NGOs and Department of Fisheries in addressing those issues.
3. To discuss the operational and logistical aspects of working with the fisherfolk Communities; and
4. To discuss training programmes related to technical, social, economic and marketing aspects of post-harvest fisheries for personnel of NGOs/Department of Fisheries and for implementing activities for the fishing communities related to these programmes.

A total of 32 participants - 19 from NGOs/ grassroot organizations represented by fishermen, eight from the Department of Fisheries, Orissa, and five from ODA-PHFP - attended the workshop and took part in the deliberations. The NGOs taking part were Project Swaraja, People's Rural Education Movement (PREM), United Artists Association, Loksakthi and Samagra Bikash Parishad.

The workshop was inaugurated by Mr. M.K. Ahmed, Additional Director of Fisheries, Cuttack, who spoke of the present status of marine fisheries in Orissa, and pointed out with statistics the loss in value of fish due to lack of efforts on post-harvest care of fish caught and landed. He pointed out that the fisherfolk's income would be greatly enhanced if proper post-harvest attention was paid to the catch. Mr. Ahmed and the officers of the PHFP explained the objectives of the workshop and invited the participants to express their needs and issues without any inhibitions.

## Video film shown

A video film on the activities of the PHFP in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh was shown to appraise the participants about the introduction of specially designed aluminium fish containers for women fish retailers, insulated ice boxes for use on board fishing craft, permanent ice boxes on shore to serve fisherfolk for the storage of fish and ice, and rack drying of anchovies to obtain dried fish of high quality.

The fisherfolk and the NGO participants expressed their needs, prob-

lems and possible means of solving them, covering the entire gamut of social, operational and technical issues relating to the villages, communities and the fishing profession. The social problems mentioned were illiteracy, the low status of women, alcoholism, poor health and hygiene of families, non-availability of land rights and eviction, high population growth, lack of credit and indebtedness.

Operational and technical problems related to non-availability of ice and storage of ice and fish, lack of transport facilities, lack of market information/prices for fresh fish and dry fish products, lack of technical know-how for hygienic production of processed fish and value-added products, lack of credit for working capital, lack of general awareness about post-harvest handling and preservation of fish and requirement of minimum support price for fresh fish and infrastructural facilities.

The officials of the Department of Fisheries explained in detail the various welfare and credit schemes implemented by the Department for the coastal fisherfolk, and ways and means of access to them.

All the problems enumerated by the fisherfolk and emphasized by the NGOs working with them do not come under the direct objectives of the PHFP. It was explained by the PHFP officials that the PHFP could provide inputs towards building up the capacity of the NGOs in taking up project initiations in the fisheries sector through appropriate training programmes and

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# Sociological and Regional Issues in Project Planning

**T**HE TRADITIONAL fisheries sector suffers from a host of critical post-harvest problems and issues which are related to the traditional ways of processing and marketing. As a result of poor processing, the products are downgraded as poor-quality products and are therefore low-value products. The loss due to downgrading is characterized as 'economic loss' or loss in potential revenue to the producer.

Our aim is to identify, characterize and discuss the sociological and regional issues involved in project planning in post-harvest fisheries. The type of intervention that is envisaged through the project planning is to help the fisherfolk with improved handling, processing and quality control, which will lower the level of post-harvest losses. This will improve their economic gains.

An appropriate intervention is possible only in the context of analytical understanding of the sociological issues such as socio-political, cultural and economic conditions of the community or region, and the factors that may prevent their effectiveness, through some case studies.

All the communities in the rural villages have their own form of traditional governance, enjoying a certain degree of community sanction for their decisions. The governance is carried out through a set of norms and conditions which influence their social behaviour. The consequences of such a self-regulatory mechanism are obvious. They may be either generally spontaneous responses to interventions or to change the process requiring minimal inducement arising from con-

scious or unconscious community behaviour, or could take the form of resistance to interventions for fear of losing the leadership or altering power equations. These considerations are to be taken into account while trying to analyse the self-regulatory mechanism and identify the right type of intervention for possible solutions to the problems of the community.

The following guidelines might help in understanding the inner dynamics of the community:

## a) **Access to resources**

- Regulation over the use of fishing grounds
- Control over the exploitation and use of resources
- Use of craft/gear combinations
- Drawing boundaries on fishing grounds (restricted area, prohibition, etc.)

## b) **Resource exploitation efforts**

- Skill performance (information on fishing grounds, resource behaviour availability, duration, abundance, etc.)
- Craft/gear efficiency
- Fishing strategy

## c) **Behavioural aspect of fisherfolk and institutions**

- Regulation of fisherfolk organizations (cooperatives, unions, input supply organizations, etc.)
- Community groups (women's organizations, youth clubs, etc.)

## d) **Regulation of community behaviour**

- Social, political, economic and cultural priorities

## Identifying factors in favour of or against intervention

### A. **Preventive factors**

1. Socio-political and cultural factors
2. Non-existence of sufficient organizational capabilities
3. Lack of awareness and understanding of socio-political values of resource exploitation and use (nutritional value, inter-community bargaining power, employment opportunities, etc.)

### B. **Economic factors**

- lack of optimization desire
- immobility of factors of production (lack of alternative employment)
- lack of capital resources
- absence of new and powerful market outlets
- lack of knowledge about the relationship between effort and resource dynamics (inappropriate harvesting and processing technologies)
- lack of understanding of the impact of technological improvement on resources

## C. Promoting factors

### 1. Socio-political and cultural factors

- existence of sufficient organizational capabilities
- **awareness and understanding of socio-political values of resource exploitation and use** (nutritional value, inter-community bargaining power, employment opportunities, etc.)
- understanding of the importance of the establishment of interventions and of organizations
- acceptance, credibility and involvement in decision-making process

### 2. Economic factors

- mobility of factors of production (existence of alternative employment opportunities, etc.)
- economic motivations and expectations
- low costs and simplicity of implementation and enforcement

- good understanding of the relationship between effort and resource dynamics (impact of harvesting and processing technologies, etc.)

### Identification of issues related to post-harvest fisheries

- species identification
- seasonality
- fresh fish market demand
- surplus
- buyers' psychology
- cultural ethos towards dry fish
- production relationship

### Kinds of interventions

Interventions have multiple or collateral effects at community or regional levels,

According to the range of influence, intensity and periodicity, interventions can be classified into:

- regulatory measures

- policies
- **plans and programmes on the basis of production and marketing relationships**

In terms of interventions, it could be in the form of:

- **production unit (craft/gear input)**
- community (fisherfolk organizations, institutions, etc.)
- fishery (stock, industry, market)

Interventions may arise from two different sources:

- people (autonomous)
- induced (outside)

Decisions for interventions on the basis of fishery activities, including post-harvest, have been based on some kind of information and knowledge about the fishery situation and the possible expected outcome of such interventions.

J. LUCAS

Santhidan, Nagercoil  
Tamil Nadu

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## Workshop at Bhubaneswar

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towards institutional strengthening; the PHFP could assist the NGOs to evolve and set up suitable monitoring systems, and develop an information centre on social development and post-harvest technologies. The PHFP will also facilitate the NGOs/fisherfolk to access institutions, governments (state and central) that are involved in meeting needs relating to the community such

as education, health, village hygiene and sanitation, disasters, etc., and to develop suitable schemes that will help to modify the policies in terms of addressing post-harvest needs.

It is hoped that PHFP activities will start in Orissa by early 1995.

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**The views expressed in the articles in this Newsletter are those of the authors/contributors concerned, and not necessarily of the Overseas Development Administration.**

# Fish Marketing Containers for Women Vendors

**O**VER THE LAST three years, the Post-Harvest Fisheries Project (PHFP) of the Overseas Development Administration has been involved in implementing a joint programme of support to itinerant women fish vendors in South India.

The marketing and distribution of low-value fish by women 'head loader' fish vendors is employment of the last resort for a larger number of women who operate on very low margins – buying 20 to 35 kg/day of fish at the beach for resale in local markets reached by foot and public transport. In common with all small-scale fisherfolk, these women suffer from low returns from their labour. This is due to poor fish handling, a lack of processing and preservation facilities, problems in physical unloading of fish, and the severe nature of market imperfections.

In late 1989, the PHFP was contacted by Santhidan – a non-governmental organization in Kanyakumari



*This specially designed aluminium fish container, totally leak-proof, can easily be carried on the head.*

District, Tamil Nadu – and invited to investigate the problems inherent in the traditional fish basket used by itinerant women fish traders. The traditional baskets had several drawbacks when used, such as leakage of water on women's heads and body; as a result, their load became rather unpleasant and they were not permitted to travel in public buses at peak hours, which coincides with the time when women start to venture out for the markets. As a consequence, the women suffered a distress sale associated with losses.

A study was commissioned and prototypes were designed through the Technical Design Centre of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay, to produce a suitable container for women. The cost of these prototypes worked out at Rs. 400 per container, at 1989 prices. The PHFP re-examined the situation in mid-1990. The situation had changed a little: women had started using different types of aluminium vessels in addition to bamboo baskets for transportation. Despite this, the women faced problems as these containers were not suitable for transportation due to their varied sizes and lack of proper lids to cover them. Moreover, the containers had to be kept in the foot passage within the buses, which invited public disapproval.

## 'Idli pot'

A new fish marketing container was seen as a solution to the problem. A common 'idli pot', which seemed to meet the various specifications suggested by the IIT Centre, was introduced among 71 fish vendors in Santhidan villages. Subsequent research on the women's responses to this idli pot container was carried out;

this revealed that the pots were unacceptable to the women traders, principally because they were unhappy with the idea of being seen with 'idli pots' on their heads and called 'idli sellers' rather than recognized as fish vendors.

Based on the suggestions made by these women, another design was then developed which did not suffer from these negative cultural associations. A hundred units of the prototype were manufactured in two sizes, one of 18 inches diameter and 11-3/4 inches height, and the other of 15 inches diameter and 11-3/4 inches height. These were distributed again to the women's groups. Participatory research, mostly in the form of individual and group discussions with women beneficiaries, demonstrated that this model too had its shortcomings which made it difficult to handle and transport.

From the very beginning, it was clear that no one design of container could possibly satisfy the whims and desires of different marketing women; a compromise was ultimately necessary. An early design, for example, was originally manufactured without handles which made it difficult to lift it. Subsequently, handles were requested and added to the design, and a perforated plate was provided to allow fish to drain inside the container. These were both needs expressed by some women which, although technically possible, ultimately proved impractical. Adding handles, which were riveted onto the container, reduced the overall strength and hence the utility of the vessel, and the cost of providing a perforated plate (which meant an extra Rs. 20 per unit) was considered too high for the value of its utility.

Based on the women's comments and observations, further refinements were made to the design of the container. The original large-size container with 18-inch diameter was not considered for promotion due to its high cost associated with the need to use large discs for manufacture. Finally, two sizes were manufactured which would suit the requirements of small-scale fish vendors and thus enabled them to carry 15-35 kg of fish:

Medium - 15" dia, 11-3/4" height, 30 kg capacity.

Small - 12" dia, 11-3/4" height, 15 kg capacity.

The medium-size container is the optimum size used universally by women fish traders. The small-size container is specifically being requested by the old-aged and those who deal with minimum quantities through street vending in neighbouring villages. The height and maximum diameter were determined by the normal under-seat clearance of public transport buses in Tamil Nadu.

### **Cost factor**

The main issue to be resolved for wider dissemination of fish containers was to minimize the cost of the container. The original price was Rs. 250 for a medium-size container (15" diameter), which was subsequently reduced to Rs. 160. The propensity to spend for a tool of the trade among fisherwomen is low. The women opted to pay for the cost of the container through easy monthly instalments on a credit basis with Santhidan. The need for a subsidy was considered to introduce these containers among thousands of women traders in the organized sector, viz., Fisherwomen Cooperative Societies in Tamil Nadu.

On July 7, 1991, a meeting was organized in Madras when representatives from the Fisherwomen Cooperative Societies, officials of the Department of Fisheries and the State Social Welfare Board were invited for discussions and to determine the willingness of women to use the container,

The Social Welfare Board volunteered to provide a 50 per cent subsidy in the form of a matching grant to the Fisherwomen Cooperative Societies, and the Department of Fisheries was involved in assisting the women's groups in forwarding and complying with the requirements envisaged for getting matching grants. Though these societies are not functioning through elected Board members now, the former President of these women's groups took the initiative in identifying potential users and collection of money after the field demonstrations made by the PHFP.

During the year 1991-92, a total of 1,362 women from 24 Fisherwomen Cooperative Societies in eight coastal districts obtained fish containers. Following the distribution of the containers, field visits were made and participatory observations and discussions were held with different women's groups who obtained the containers, as well as with other fish vendors, to find out about the utility of the containers.

The demand from the fisherwomen vendors as well as from the government schemes and their expressed commitment to increase the supply of the container over a five-year period led the project to carry out a thorough evaluation and review of the impact of the container on the beneficiaries. The survey, which was carried out for a period of three months during 1992, highlighted the fact that the containers were after all being used for the right purpose by most beneficiaries. The women expressed a genuine liking for the container. The transport issues were addressed in two out of six places and investigated. There were no potential economic benefits reported through use of this fish container,

### **Research study**

In March/April 1993, a parallel line of research was set up in the form of an attribute survey in order to assess the perceptions of users of this con-

tainer. A series of workshops was arranged with the women's groups in several areas in Tamil Nadu. In these, the women were encouraged to participate freely in focused discussion groups. The findings of this research served to underline the extreme social deprivation suffered by this sector, and the fact that status within the community is a key factor. The perception study explored the factors which influenced the women's perceptions of their own status and their opinion on the utility and social significance of the container, which is positive.

In 1992-93, the PHFP stepped back from the promotion of these containers through its direct involvement and observed that about 160 women purchased the containers in Tuticorin District. In 1993-94, it was evident that the PHFP's involvement was necessary as the State's Department of Fisheries was to allocate the necessary funds for manufacture and supply. Thus, during the year 1993-94, some 1,730 women from 30 societies availed themselves of the subsidy in the form of a matching grant from the Social Welfare Board and obtained the containers.

It is learnt that the Tamil Nadu Government has decided to promote 10,000 containers during the current financial year. Some of the target NGO of the PHFP have incorporated the promotion of the containers under the credit schemes either linked to financial institutions or their in-house schemes. Apart from providing fish marketing women with better hygienic conditions through the use of these containers, the container has achieved some of the more long-term objectives, such as increased awareness of the State organizations and NGOs to the needs of an extremely marginalized group of women. And it has also shown the women in the Fisherwomen Cooperative Societies how it is possible

to access State subsidies.

A. KAMILA

ODA-PHFP, Madras

# Commercial Viability of Small Business Units in Development Field

**A**T A TIME when the winds of globalization are blowing across the country and everybody is talking about competition and the market economy, where do small business units in the development sector stand? It may be mentioned that the general trend in the country is to reduce subsidies in line with market forces. The micro business units in the development sector are usually supported with the assistance of subsidies. The experience with one such project, the Anchovy Drying Project (ADP), is quite interesting and worth sharing with others.

The ADP is a project of the Kanyakumari District Fishermen Sangam Federation (KDFSF), with technical, financial and marketing support from the Overseas Development Administration's Post-Harvest Fisheries Project (ODA-PHFP). The project aims to increase the income of artisanal fishermen by providing better post-harvest technology and marketing support. In this regard, the project procures and markets low-value species, especially anchovy (*neihiw*), during glut landings, when the price of fresh fish crashes to a very low level. This enables fishermen to secure a fair price during glut landings.

The rack technology used by the project was developed by the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT), Cochin, and this novel method of drying on two-tier wooden racks has the advantage of sand-free, high-quality dried fish, as against the conventional sand-drying method which gives only poor-quality products. Operations under the project range from setting up drying racks, procurement and storage to marketing. ODA-PHFP has played a creative role by providing

needed technical support and helping to establish a marketing network.

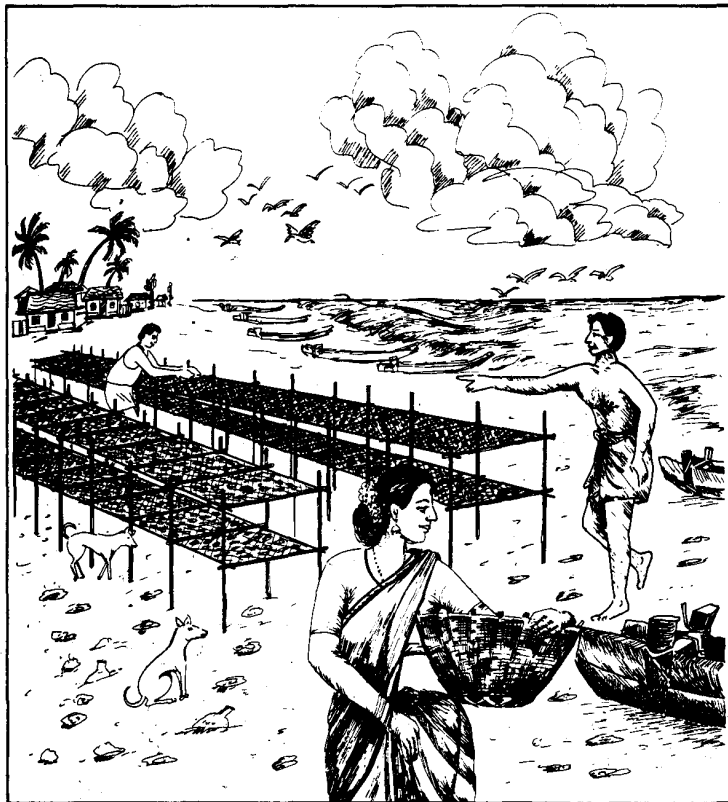
The project, with the assistance from ODA-PHFP, was successful in procuring rack-dried anchovy from a large number of processors spread over three project villages. From a development point of view, the project has achieved its objective. However, one cannot ignore the fact that commercial viability is the crux of any business unit, whether in the corporate or the development field. Now the question is: how do we achieve commercial viability for small business units in the development field, which has many social constraints. For example, the anchovy project pays a reasonably

high labour charge to the fisherwomen

for making one of the products.

## Marketing strategy

Commercial viability can be achieved for such business units if one looks at various operations from an entrepreneurial point of view. This can be achieved without sacrificing the social objectives of the project. For this, streamlining of various functional areas aimed at cost-cutting without compromising on quality standards is an inevitable factor. Another factor is that of doing business for the 'non-members'; a classic example of this is the Anand-pattern cooperative milk societies. Besides, a marketing strategy



*The use of wooden thying racks (like those seen above) snakes for better-quality thy fish, giving more income to small-scale producers and fishermen.*

termed as 'key informants'. In most cases, the set of questions to be addressed by each member of the team is agreed prior to the field visit. For the purpose, a set of points that need to be examined in the field is noted by each expert. These notes are called 'check lists' in RRA parlance. While there are no strictly laid out guidelines for the conduct of an RRA, there are a few points that need to be kept in mind while selecting the team of experts:

- a) They must be familiar with the local language and culture.
- b) They must work with a limited list of objectives, in line with the purpose of the particular project.

### Data collection

The techniques used by the experts for the collection of data usually do not follow any set pattern. While the manner in which the whole process of data collection is left to the discretion of the team members, there are a few techniques that are used often. They usually take the following forms:

- a) Informal interviewing: Open-ended questions are asked and recorded about specific topics following a general outline; usually in the form of a check-list. However, flexibility is maintained in so far as additional subjects are incorporated as and when they arise. In the case of the post-harvest sector in fisheries, interviews are usually done with fishermen to find out details of the resource base in the local area.
- b) Conversations: Informal conversations with key informants or with small groups for specific sets of information that would be useful additions to the database. This method is particularly useful while collecting information from traders, who generally tend to become reti-

cent when the interaction takes the form of a question-answer session.

- c) Observation: Careful documentation of observed events and behaviour. This method is particularly useful while designing technological interventions such as gutting of fish, for the implement used for the purpose varies across the coast.
- d) Collection of data from secondary sources: Previously published and unpublished records - these

We would be interested in hearing of other people's experiences in addressing the issue of monitoring in the post-harvest fisheries sector, especially at the community level. You can get in touch with us at:

**ODA Post-Harvest Fisheries Project**  
**91 St, Mary's Road**  
**Abhirampuram**  
**Madras 666 018**

Please give details of the nature of the activity undertaken by your organization (i.e., work with coastal communities) and your own position in the organization, i.e., management or field level.

resources are particularly useful for studying the demographic characteristics of the community.

- e) Structured questionnaires: Usually used for the collection of data on possession of craft and gear combinations, implements for processing fish, etc.

It needs to be noted that the choice of technique used depends on the sets of questions that are being asked. In order to validate the information collected, the same exercise is carried out with different groups. This process is known as triangulation. However, the process is time-consuming and one might end up with contradictory sets of information being provided by various groups. Given the short timeframes, there is usually not much time left to go back to the field when the report-writing starts, which is when such contradictions are usually discovered. It then falls on the subjective judgement of the team members to decide which source of information is right.

The other problem with RRA is that the information is recorded by the 'experts' which results in the errors in the recording of information. Besides this, there is considerable respondent fatigue as the agenda is decided by the members of the team. This usually results in the respondents losing interest in the subject at hand as their concerns might be different from those of the team.

### Diagramming methods

PRA attempts to get around this problem involving the community in the collection of information. In most cases, communities lack the ability to express themselves in written forms; consequently, diagrams are used for the recording of data. The following methods are most commonly used in diagramming:

*Mapping* : The sea and village resources are presented in a map that is drawn by a few community members, with other members providing/checking the accuracy of the information.

*Time line*: Important events, i.e., technical interventions, natural disasters that took place in the village/region.

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# Rapid Assessment Procedures as a Monitoring Tool

which avoids middlemen but establishes distribution networks like any other business enterprise should be given prime importance.

It is a fact that small business projects in the development sector, in the initial phase, have to rely on donor agencies to meet the working capital requirements, as most of the projects are not 'bankable' or will take sufficient time to become bankable. In this scenario, care should be taken to treat this sum from the donor agencies as a 'business advance' rather than a subsidy. The implication is that the product costing would have to consider all cash flows from a business point of view

The ADP in its restructuring process has done away with the old practices such as non-inclusion of cost items like staff salary and assistance (donor agencies in 'business transactions'). As a measure to increase the turnover, the project decided to procure from non-members and extend marketing services to similar organizations.

Taking cognizance of the increasing competition from the private sector, the ADP has decided to go for full-fledged market intervention, initially in the Southern states and later expanding to the Northern states. The wholesale and retail networks being established are indicators to this effect. To look after the overall operations of the project, an Advisory Committee consisting of representatives of ODA, KDFS and the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (the apex body of KDFS) has been created. Besides, a core management team, headed by a project manager, has been constituted. With these changes, a turnaround is expected in the coming season.

**PLACID DANIEL**  
**OVA —PHFP**  
**Madras**

**M**ONITORING has been utilized by development managers as an aid for deciding the future course of action. In the past, much of the monitoring was done using conventional questionnaire methods, which were expensive and time-consuming. By the time the findings were made available, they had long since lost their relevance with the rapid changes that had taken place in the development process.

More often than not, such methods threw up more questions than answers, as what was being attempted was the quantification of human endeavour. This left many of the fine and vital points that were not amenable to quantification out of the analysis. The last two decades have seen fairly rapid strides in monitoring methods, with a multidisciplinary approach being adopted.

In response to the requirement of short lead times and the need for a multidisciplinary framework, rapid assessment procedures (RAP) evolved. RAP is a common term used for two related methodologies: rapid rural appraisal (RRA) and participatory rural appraisal (PRA). While the manner in which the data is presented is the same in both methods, the collection and recording of information is different. While the former method is extractive, the latter returns the data collected back to the community.

RRA brings together a team of 'experts' whose expertise is considered to be relevant with reference to the set of questions that are sought to be examined. The experts pay a visit to the field, so as to examine the processes at work first-hand. The collection of data is usually through the use of knowledgeable local people who are



*fisherfolk of Alikuppam village in Changanpattu-MGR District, Tamil Nadu, taking part in a PRA (participatory rural appraisal) training programme.*

# Story of a Fisherwoman

This was first published in COPDANET NEWS (newsletter of Coastal Poor Development Action Network) and is reprinted here by courtesy of COPDANET

*My name is Macha Gandhi  
I live on the coast of the Bay of Bengal  
far, far away from Madras city or any other town.  
Our villages are secluded, our work  
throws us on the shores of the sea.  
People say that we are fortunate to live  
on such a beautiful spot  
to enjoy the creation of God.  
But do we ever see the elegance of God's handiwork?  
We watch the sea, the sky and the clouds from morning until  
evening  
to judge the mood of our Mother Ocean.  
Is it too angry to overthrow our catamarans  
or is it ready to welcome our folk  
to catch the fish that it breeds?*

*What a joy when the blue, smooth, moving ocean  
stretches its hands and invites our men on its beds!  
What a joy to stand on the shore  
to receive the returning catamarans with a big catch!  
As they come, the women rush forward,  
wait for the nets to be emptied on the sand.  
Their interest is not in the struggling fish here  
and there jumping in its new environment,  
but on the whole catch.  
As the men take care of the nets,  
the women dash off to call out in the auction  
and race to the market before their goods  
change colour and stink.*

*The sea can be angry for weeks together.  
If the catamarans venture out, they capsize  
in the high waves and get lost.  
Yes, we stand helplessly in agony on the shore  
hours together, with no hope of their return.  
The cruel sea does not return the dead soul  
to mourn and to bury,  
It is cruel, it is cruel.*

*Life for the fisherfolk is hard.  
If the sea refuses to admit our men  
we are sunk: there's no alternative task.  
It's worse than the landless labourers,  
nothing to work on and nothing to live on.  
Even on days the catamarans are accepted,  
the harvest may be poor due to scarcity of fish  
in the fishing areas.  
It's hardly enough to eat and to spare.  
Prawns are our golden coins  
but they appear on our coast  
when the monsoon washes away the shores.  
Should our men risk their lives to haul  
the costly marine product is the question.*

*Do our problems end there?  
No, women are the marketers.*

*How do they go about it?  
Yes, walk, walk, with a head-load which bears hard  
upon the skull, the neck - why, the whole body.  
Walk, walk, kilometre after kilometre  
to find a welcoming consumer  
in the heat that fries the sand.  
But the women bear it all in patience  
that is unknown to the world.  
What about winter? We are stuck, with no way  
to cross as the backwaters rise and block the path.  
Is there a hope to build a bridge to link our village  
with the outside world?  
We have cried - cried year after year,  
there is none to hear our voice.  
Our voices are washed away  
like our life by the sea.  
How sad, how sad!*

*In all seasons the road transport  
rebels - why, stubbornly refuses to touch our village.  
It means no article of any size  
can reach our village except with human help.  
What a struggle! Where to go?  
Who will hear our supplications?*

*The transport problem does not end there.  
Words fail to express my agony on that day,  
I don't know what I did  
but I was shaken in the night with shivering fever  
to close my eyes to the world.  
The temperature persisted. I had no pill to swallow  
and none to extend a relieving injection.  
So at daybreak, whether I lived or died,  
I had to be on the road to knock at a tiny clinic  
three kilometres away to get some relief.  
I was alone - no cyclist took pity on me,  
none to accompany me in the heat.  
The long trek was an agony known  
to no soul except God.  
This is not a single case but the experience  
of one or other of us every day.*

*My name is Macha Gandhi  
I don't know why I am named so  
Maybe I should be the "mother for the fisherfolk".  
I'm proud that our Meenavar Magalir Munnetra Sangam  
had faith in me and made me a leader.  
Surely I will fulfil their trust.  
Yes, I'll be a mother to my children  
and to my fisherfolk.*

**SUCUNA DEVASUNDARAM  
COPDANET**

**Note: Mrs. Macha Gandhi is a fisherwoman living in  
Periakuppam, Chengalpattu-MCR District, Tamil Nadu.**

*Trends:* Changes that have taken place over time. This is usually with respect to changes in the marine resource base.

*Seasonality chart:* Usually used to identify the months during which particular species of fish are available or specific activities are undertaken.

*Matrix ranking:* Scoring of relative importance of various species of fish in total catches, manner of transformation, perception of social positions, etc.

*Chappati diagrams:* Used as a means of identifying and establishing relationships between individuals and communities, as well as for working out cause-effect relationships.

While the diagramming methods described are the most commonly used, there are no hard-and-fast rules with respect to their use. Two factors need to be kept in mind while conducting the diagramming exercise:

- a) A rapport needs to be established with the local population, such that all sections of the community participate in the provision of information during the exercise.

- b) Locally appropriate and relevant materials, such as stones, seeds, sticks, etc., are to be used for recording the information provided.

The use of diagrams in PRA enables the providers of information to understand and, if need be, correct the errors in the manner in which data is recorded. As the process of collection is from the community as a whole, the problems of contradictory sets of information being provided are greatly reduced. In cases where there is disagreement, the community at large is able to come to some consensus.

### Lack of time

RAP exercises are not a substitute to conventional longitudinal research studies. It is inadequate when it comes to designing and arriving at a long-term strategy of a project. This is primarily on account of the problems inherent in the technique.

These problems could be broadly classified as accuracy, representativeness and subjectivity. Most of these problems arise on account of lack of time for cross-checking information.

An example is when a needs assessment was done by ODA-PI IFP on

the need for a transport system for fisherwomen in a southern district of Tamil Nadu, participants in the RAP exercise reported that they wanted to have a van to get them quickly to the market, as the public transport system did not cater to their requirement. However, when the van hire scheme was actually sought to be implemented, the participants were reluctant to undertake it as the scheme in their mind would lead to greater competition. This provision of incorrect information was the result of a lack of time being available to conduct a process of triangulation.

The problems outlined earlier must be kept in mind while interpreting the data collected. There needs to be a trade-off between research duration and quantity and accuracy of information. This trade-off is best achieved through either 'optimal ignorance' or 'appropriate imprecision', the wording being chosen on one's outlook i.e. positive or negative. Given the vast stretches of coastline that need to be monitored, RAP appears to be the only answer at the moment.

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