

# SECTOR-WIDE IMPACT ASSESSMENT ON COASTAL SMALL FISHERS

The Daily Star and Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) organised an online discussion titled "Sector-Wide Impact Assessment on Coastal Small Fishers" on April 7, 2021. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.



**SHAHEEN ANAM,**  
Executive Director,  
MJF

This was a 31-month action research project. The Danish Institute of Human Rights (DIHR) invited us to collaborate with them in implementing a project on sustainable oceans.

The whole idea behind the project was to undertake a sector-wide impact assessment of the marine artisanal fisheries, the small fisherfolks. These fisherfolks collect fish in the oceans and face huge physical and mental obstacles. These groups are marginalised both in terms of the geographic location and the income they receive. MJF has collaborated with COAST Trust and Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) to undertake this project.

The work was challenging not only in terms of gathering data but also in terms of coming up with policy recommendations for the government. The idea from DIHR was to look at the human rights condition of these people involved in the fisheries sector. So many of these fisherfolks actually perish while fishing and many come back injured. They then face further challenges of big trawlers coming in with electric nets to catch fish, leaving the livelihoods of the small fisherfolks in great peril.

Marine fish are a great source of protein and the coastal areas have huge potential that has not been fully realised until now. If we can properly manage this sector and address the needs and challenges of the fisherfolks, it would be a win-win situation for our entire population. There are various challenges and we primarily need policy support to overcome the present hurdles. The government has committed to form a National Marine Policy but it was delayed due to the current pandemic. But, we hope the policy will be formed and it should include the issues of the small fisheries.

Women are especially marginalised in these areas and policy formulation in this sector must take into account the gender dimension as well.



**MD. MUJIBUL HAQUE MUNIR,**  
Joint Director-  
Education, Food  
Security, Development  
Communication &  
Projects, COAST Trust

The SWIA has been carried out in Chile and in Bangladesh. The main objective of the project was to document the human rights implications and impacts pertaining to fisheries and aquaculture and address these in selected national and global dialogues, policies and strategies for sustainable development and responsible business.

With the SWIA, we tried to capture five areas: impact of climate change on the Bay of Bengal, legal and policy analysis, rapid situation assessment during COVID-19 and 65-day ban, human rights situation in the shrimp sector of Bangladesh, and industrial marine fisheries sector in Bangladesh.

We surveyed 1,400 men and 600 women with 19 focus group discussions. We have tried to gather information under four specific criteria. This includes labour conditions, standard of living, situation of women, and the right to a healthy environment.

Our study found that 80 percent of the fishermen feel that they have insufficient life-saving equipment on board and half of the fishermen said that they have no warning system that reaches them at sea. 39 percent fishermen reported having no communication equipment whatsoever on board while 35 percent relied on mobile phones for as far as they could reach. 97 percent fishermen reported that harbour facilities are not safe. Approximately one-third of the fishermen said that they are underpaid.

Almost all the fishermen reported fishing as their main source of income which does not generate enough money to cover their families' basic expenses. In 2020, the 65-day ban, coupled with COVID-19, caused a series of shocks in the artisanal fisheries sector with 70 percent reporting that they lost half of their income or more during this period. 33 percent of the respondents reported having no income at all during the ban.

75 percent of the female respondents who have experienced loss or grave injury of their husbands, fathers, or sons at sea, did not receive any compensation. 68 percent of the female respondents reported that they have experienced problems and harassment when male family members went to sea. On the other hand, 93 percent male respondents agreed that the women involved in the business do not get equal pay.

We need to clearly define the rights and responsibilities of fishers, including small-scale fishers in relevant national labour legislation. We need to amend the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 to include provisions on fishers employed in the small-scale coastal fisheries sector and adopt regulatory instruments on Occupational Health and Safety that address the particular situation and needs of small-scale fishers or amend existing instruments to adequately address their needs. A minimum wage board and minimum wage for fishers need to be established. For women, we need to recognise their vital role in small-scale fisheries and promote their equal rights and opportunities as per the FAO's guidelines for Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries as well as promote and protect women's right to equal pay for equal work.

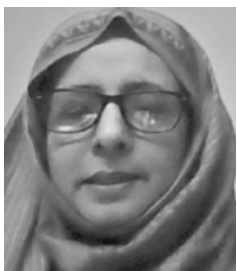


**PROF. ABDUL WAHAB,**  
Team Leader, Ecofish  
project, World Fish

The study has come up with a long list of recommendations. But, we cannot go after so many recommendations as it would not be efficient.

Marine fish are not just a source of protein but also of many necessary micronutrients which are essential for our population. For artisanal fishers, the boats going to the seas should be registered and there should be checkpoints ensuring that the boats are equipped to be at sea. The boats must firstly be physically equipped to be at sea and then it must have the necessary equipment such as life-jackets and GPS apps.

We also need to look at insurance for the people going out to sea. One issue here is that of the payment of the insurance premium. The women should also have the opportunity to organise themselves. Lastly, we need an artisanal fisheries framework for the Bay of Bengal.



**BEGUM NURUN NAHER,**  
National Operations  
Officer, FAO,  
Bangladesh

The policy recommendations are quite generic. We must find the correct way to put in place the target mechanisms so that the recommendations are actually being implemented.

The lack of a proper communications system in the fishing vessels is a huge issue. The communication system and the early warning system need to be improved. The compensation packages offered by the government to fisherwomen usually never reach them due to a lack of accessibility. This needs to be looked into. Coastal communities of women are far more vulnerable than the women in plain lands because of the very high level of death rates of their male family members. This leaves them with a lack of safety and security.

At the policy level, monitoring must be ensured along with implementation.



**DR. SAMIYA AHMED SELIM,**  
Associate Professor  
and Director of  
Centre for Sustainable  
Development,  
University of Liberal  
Arts Bangladesh  
(ULAB)

There is a need to seek out alternate livelihoods particularly for the women. During our assessment of the period of the ban, we found that the women who had access to growing their own food or had other ways of meeting their economic needs, fared better. But not many women had other forms of income.



**DR. MD. NIAMUL NASER,**  
Professor &  
Chairman,  
Department of  
Zoology, University of  
Dhaka

Climate change is taking place. Policy formation in this issue will take time.

Through the encroachment of big trawlers, all the resources, including fish, will be exhausted much quicker than before. Sustainability will be lost, and the fishers will be in trouble. It would be best to create a solid plan or put in place a strong demarcation for small-scale fishers and commercial fisheries as soon as possible.

Pollution is a big issue. Pollution on land is moving towards the sea, and entering the small-scale fishers' fishing grounds. The number of fish in these areas will drop. Their resources, income, and livelihoods will be adversely affected.

There is no policy or even sufficient economic strength to support fishers who will be negatively impacted by pollution and climate change. We need a backup plan that focuses on education. Most fishers' villages lack educational facilities. If we succeed in educating the people of these villages, within five years, fishers will know about their rights and will be able to shift to other income-generating sources. Monetary investments will not produce as many returns as education.



**REZAUL KARIM CHOWDHURY,**  
Executive Director,  
COAST Trust

Small-scale fishers are producing over 60 percent of our nation's protein. Our average per capita GDP income is over 2,000 dollars, but this is only around 1,000 dollars in the coastal areas. The national adult literacy rate is 75 percent, whereas it is only 37 percent in the coastal regions. We must address this disparity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Include the issues of the small fisheries in the National Marine Policy
- Clearly define the rights and responsibilities of fishers, including small-scale fishers and fish workers in relevant national labour legislation
- Amend the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 to include provisions on fishers employed in the small-scale coastal fisheries sector
- Adopt regulatory instruments on Occupational Health and Safety that address the particular situation and needs of small-scale fishers or amend existing instruments to adequately address their needs
- Establish a Minimum Wage Board and minimum wage for fishers
- Recognise the vital role of women in small-scale fisheries and promote their equal rights and opportunities as per the FAO's guidelines for Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries
- Promote and protect women's right to equal pay for equal work
- Register the boats going to sea and introduce checkpoints to ensure that the boats are equipped to be at sea
- Introduce life insurance for the fishermen who go to sea
- Introduce a database of all fishers who are working in the deep sea with each of them having individual ID cards
- Revisit the hazardous work list for children and assess whether the fishing activities should be considered as hazardous for children.

The licensing system is very centralised. Boats up to 50 horsepower should be decentralised to the Upazila level because it's not very technical. This would lead to a need for monitoring who goes into the sea and whether they have life jackets, radios, etc.

We tried to break the cycle of "dadon" which can be considered a slavery system. However, we failed because the power structure from the centre to the grassroots is very rigid. The government can provide subsidies to the small-scale fishers to form cooperatives, marketing channels, and cold storage at the grassroots level so that a sustainable marketing system of fish caught by small-scale fishers can be achieved.

Technical education should be emphasised. 50 percent of total dropouts occur at the intermediate level. The dropout rates are worse in the coastal areas. The government plans to commission many technical schools and colleges, which will be very expensive. Why can't we instead introduce technical courses from class eight to the intermediate level? By 2050, 70 to 80 percent of Bangladeshi people will be living in urbanised towns. This urbanisation will require many electricians, drivers, and sanitary mechanics. If trained from class

eight, the coastal people migrating to urban areas will have increased work opportunities.

A study in Bhola found that 63 percent of child marriages are of students up to class eight. If we invest in free education for adolescent girls up to the intermediate level, especially in the coastal areas, child marriage rates will drastically fall.



**NIAMUL AHSAN JEWEL,**  
Advisor-BILS,  
General Secretary-  
Jatiyo Sramik Jote  
Bangladesh

Although we mention ten lakh fishers, many more lakhs of workers are also part of the value chain. These workers are involved in processing, grading, transporting, loading and unloading trucks, exporting fish products, etc. If all workers are taken into account, this is a vast and promising sector. If the government pays more attention to this sector, we can ensure social security for the workers.

There should be a database of all fishers who are working in the deep sea. All of them should have individual ID cards.

Workspaces of female fishers have no occupational safety or health measures. The government must focus more on these vulnerable areas.

When fishers trapped in the "dadon" system are killed or lost at sea due to storms and hurricanes, their families are left as hostages forever. The government should provide SME loans to groups of fishers. Most fishers in the dadon practice lose most of their profits from the fish they catch and sell. However, if they were given SME loans, they could break out of the dadon system. They would be able to keep all their profits and gradually repay the loans.

During the 65-day fishing ban period, neighbouring countries trespass into our waters and catch tonnes of our fish. There needs to be more robust monitoring in this regard. Vietnam, India, Cambodia and Bangladesh, who share maritime boundaries, should create a law that stops fishing during this period. Adequate use of coastguards is required as well.

The government should establish a tripartite committee for the development of the National Marine Policy. The three parties

strong commitment to achieving the SDGs. Therefore, we have a good framework within which to address these issues.



**TOWFIQUL ARIF,**  
Additional Secretary,  
Ministry of Fisheries  
and Livestock,  
People's Republic of  
Bangladesh

In the fiscal year 2019-20, our fisheries sector's total production was nearly 45 lakh metric tonnes. Of this, 6.71 lakh metric tonnes were by marine fisheries, making up 14 percent of our total fish production. The production by artisanal fishers is 5.56 percent, and only 1.1 percent is industrial. Therefore, around 90 percent of our total marine production is contributed by artisanal fishing.

There are around 500,000 coastal small-scale fishers. We have provided food support to 440,000 fishers by delivering 40 kilograms of rice per month. In Cox's Bazar, 48,342 fishers and in Barguna, 39,800 fishers have been provided food support. Therefore, it is evident that the government supports small-scale artisanal fishers during the 65-day fishing ban period. During the peak breeding season, to protect mother Hilsa, there is a seven-day ban on fishing during which all coastal families are provided with 40 kilograms of rice. During the pandemic, the fisheries sector was provided 100 crore taka of financial support. 78,074 people were given cash incentives.

The Marine Fisheries Act 2020 has simplified the process for small-scale artisanal fishers to obtain fishing licenses. 12 lakh fishers have been given ID cards, but the process is still ongoing. A database exists for these ID cards as well.

Fishers going to the deep sea don't even carry compasses to guide them. We will include a condition during registration that all fishers must have early warning GPS and life-saving instruments.

A management plan for artisanal fishers is required. A chapter on this can be included in the National Marine Policy.

Our Sustainable Coastal and Marine Fisheries Project has a 500 crore taka component solely for artisanal fishers under which around 18,000 fishers will be given vocational and technical training. The project will also create 100 producer groups that will work on developing the marketing channel.

**SHAHEEN ANAM,**  
Executive Director,  
Manusher Jonno  
Foundation

We realise that the ban on fishing has resulted in increased production of fish. However, the critical issue is figuring out the extent of the negative impact the ban has on fishers. Is the government providing sufficient support to the fishers during these periods? Our concern is whether the fishers have a proper livelihood with the support that is offered to them. In a country like Bangladesh, there is always more need than we can fulfil. Therefore, it's essential to maintain transparency and accountability in delivering support to the fishers.



**SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN,**  
Commercial  
Supplements Editor,  
The Daily Star &  
Moderator of the  
session

Bangladesh has achieved self-sufficiency in fish production. Within the marine fisheries sector, artisanal small-scale fisheries still account for the biggest share of production. The marine industrial fisheries sub-sector is growing and we can expect it to continue growing in light of the recent settlement of the marine boundary dispute.

Marine fisheries constitute an important economic activity in Bangladesh and it is estimated that around 0.5 million fishermen earn their living from artisanal marine capture fisheries and although they make a significant contribution to the country's fisheries production and food security, artisanal marine fishermen are generally considered to be a poor and marginalised population group.

Through this roundtable we want to create a dialogue so that initiatives can be undertaken and tools can be applied for mitigating and monitoring human rights impacts in the fisheries sector and aquaculture in Bangladesh—thus ensuring sustainable development and responsible business in the marine capture fisheries sector.



**SILLE STIDSEN,**  
Senior Adviser,  
Human Rights and  
Development, Danish  
Institute for Human  
Rights (DIHR)

We are fortunate to have the SDG Agenda 2030, which carries many commitments to address several of the issues identified in the sector-wide impact assessments. Under SDG 14, we have targeted limiting pollution, conserving fish, controlling illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and securing small-scale artisanal fishers' access to their livelihood resources. Regarding social security and livelihood issues, we have relevant SDGs such as SDG 1 on ending poverty. For education, we have essential targets, including technical and vocational education. Bangladesh was a champion in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and gained world recognition. We know that the Bangladeshi government also has a

