Revitalise small-scale fisheries in rainfed areas

Pilots show the way

The RRA Network and partner organisations work with NGOs, livelihood promoting forums, policy groups, technical institutes and research centres keen to support and promote small-scale fishery in rainfed areas. The key focus areas are:

- Economic analysis of small-scale fisheries;
- Working with farmers to manage fisheries, and connecting small-scale producers directly to markets;
- Working with women’s groups to enhance their status in fisheries;
- Working out strategies and advocacy for national level policy and programmes.

The pilots have yielded encouraging achievements towards the development and promotion of inland fisheries. A significant change has been made to the lives and livelihoods of fisher communities in Tikamgarh and Chhatarpur districts in Bundelkhand, Madhya Pradesh, where more than 20,000 families have organised themselves in 200 co-operatives to take control over the 200 ponds there for aquaculture and agriculture. Similarly, in Andhra Pradesh, creation of a mandal-level fishery resource centre has brought villagers from different communities to take up aquaculture.

These pilots assert the strength of smallholders in inland fishery sector – their leadership, ability to influence policies and practices, power in the market, adaptability to technological changes and resilience to different risks. The RRA Network will take these experiences to other states and at the national level to advocate for changes in policy and programme.

For queries relating to the FISHERIES node, contact:

The RRA Network
Secretariat: WASSAN, House No. 12-13-450, Street No. 1, Tarnaka,
Secunderabad 500 017,
ANDHRA PRADESH
secretariat@rainfedindia.org
www.rainfedindia.org
CRISIS IN FISHERIES

Inland fisheries in India support 14.5 million people; millions more are employed in ancillary activities. In rainfed areas, developing fisheries alongside agriculture can supplement the income of farmers, distribute risk and improve nutrition. Agricultural waste becomes fish feed, thereby reducing the capital for fishery. This approach encourages farmers to restore or create local water bodies for fishing that also provide irrigation and scope for horticulture.

Fisheries in rainfed water bodies have been largely left out of national development initiatives.

Public policy and investment have focused on major carps and selected exotic species. This has left unexplored the huge potential in India’s rich base of inland resources that produce a range of indigenous species. Access is a major concern: to water bodies (most are in the common property regimes) and their management for fishery development, to quality seed and technology, to markets and to credit. These restrict poor fisher communities from investing in fish farming. Owing to poor post-harvesting and processing facilities, fisherfolk get very low prices for their produce, despite the huge demand for fish in the domestic market.

Women play a vital role, comprising 72 per cent of the total workforce in the sector. There is a huge potential for them to develop skill and increase participation. However, customary beliefs, norms, laws and unfavourable policy have reduced women’s access to resources, confining them to the lower end of the supply chain.

**Problem areas**

- Ineffective usage and development of water bodies.
- Focus on increasing production instead of strengthening value chain.
- Non-availability of timely and adequate quality seed of commercial species.
- Absence of uniform policy for leasing and for giving long-term aquaculture rights to farmers.
- Constraints in mobilising institutional finance for small fish farmers.
- Lack of a policy framework and inadequate technical support.

**RRA premise**

Inland fisheries constitute an integral part of the Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture (RRA) Network because of its vast potential to support smallholders in rainfed areas. Special focus and support systems can help increase productivity and income by over three times.

The introduction of a uniform leasing policy for all states and for giving long-term aquaculture rights to interested fish farmers is a key solution. Availability of adequate quality fish seed and technical support will further enhance productivity. A well-planned public investment and policy is required to develop institutional capacities and fishery infrastructure since private investments are hard to come by in the common property regimes. Farmers need technical and financial assistance to take up inland fisheries in a major way.

**What we want**

1. Appropriate scientific management protocols that increase the adaptive capacity of fishing communities in rainfed areas;

2. Appropriate institutional systems of natural resources management for sustained fish production – sharing of usufruct will mitigate vulnerability and risk in rainfed fisheries;

3. Harnessing potential water bodies for fish rearing, and public investment to develop the fisheries value chain will improve production and livelihood opportunities for small farmers in rainfed areas.

**OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY INITIATIVES**

1. Develop a National Inland Fisheries Policy for resource sustenance, to support and strengthen inland fisheries, and encourage states to create specific policies.

2. Share and discuss the guidelines, framed by Fisheries Division of Ministry of Agriculture, GoI in November 2010, for the states for framing a bill on inland fisheries and aquaculture, with all stakeholders in the state.

3. Collaborate effectively with the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme to develop tanks and ponds and to create dead storage, strengthen bunds, etc. with focus on improving productivity.

4. Establish fisheries resource centres (FRCs) in rainfed areas for technical support and to strengthen primary stakeholders’ institutions and research.

5. Build primary stakeholders’ institutions at various levels, crucial to enhancing productivity and sustaining growth, and allocate budget to strengthen existing institutions.

6. Ensure that women and poor fishers are not left out of the benefits of the policy initiatives.

7. Allocate budget to establish hatcheries for quality fish seed production and satellite fish seed rearing centres.

8. Allocate budget to improve basic infrastructure and access, such as landing centres, ice plants, local markets and marketing places, transport vehicles, nets, ice boxes and boats.

9. Design, develop and support innovative approaches and programmes for small-scale inland fisheries to benefit the landless and other marginalised groups.