

SOCIAL SECURITY MEASURES FOR FISHER FOLK: A STUDY IN K.K. DISTRICT, TAMILNADU

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Abstract

Welfare schemes gain central stage in all deliberations of policy makers both in the parliament and in the state legislature and more particularly during the time of elections. Government of India has implemented both in the centre and in the states, numerous welfare schemes in the past sixty years of planned economy to offer social security to the poor, particularly to the fisherfolk. Government of Tamilnadu, for example, has allocated Rs.193 crores to the Fisheries Department in its latest budget of 2010. However, the continuing underdevelopment and abject poverty of the costal population raises serious questions about the 60 years of government efforts. This study explores this anomaly by going into the welfare scheme registers available in the government offices in the study area. Results indicate a significant discrepancy and flaw in planning of the fund allocation by policy makers and ineffective execution of the same. This paper explores methods for enhancing social security measures of the fisher folk, increasing involvement of the policy makers and thus improving the plight of the costal people, drawing attention to tap the already available resources among them. A future scope in this regard can be to study the social security measures for fisherfolk throughout Tamilnadu.

Introduction

A major division of every human society is that of "haves and have-nots". Society, which is constituted on the principle of greater good for the greater number of people, therefore evolves systems like social security to protect the have-nots and the weak. According to International Labour Organization (ILO) social security refers to "The security that society furnishes, through appropriate organizations, against certain risks to which its members are exposed.....social security is designed to prevent and cure disease, to support when people are unable to earn and restore to gainful employment".

Social security is executed through structures like Social assistance and Social insurance. Social assistance denotes the

benefits provided by the community or the government to the persons of small means. It is given in the form of right to maintain minimum standards of need. It is normally financed from taxation. ILO states, "Social assistance is a service or scheme, which provides benefits to persons of small means as of right in amount sufficient to meet minimum standards of need and financed from taxation". Social insurance, on the other hand, aims to give benefits to the labourers in proportion to the contribution made by them, their employers and State. Beveridge defines it as "the giving in return for contribution, benefits up to subsistence level, as of right and without means-test, so that an individual may build freely upon it. Thus social insurance implies that it is compulsory" (Radha, 2005) Hence, social insurance has been made compulsory all over the world including India.

The fisherfolk in India fall into this category of the have-nots given to the seasonal, unpredictable and perishable nature of their work. The Constitution of India emphasizes the importance to protect the lives of fishermen indicating fisheries as a state subject under item 21 of the state list of Article 246. (Rajan.1996). Realizing its constitutional responsibility the government of Tamilnadu like other state governments offers various schemes and benefits to the fishermen through Fishermen Co-operative Societies. However, the plight of the fisher folk, who contribute 1.4% to the GDP of India, (Surapa Raju.2003, and Prahadesswaran.2004), remains unaltered even after six decades of planned economy (Pazhani.2008). Therefore, a study of this nature is pertinent to know the social security measures available and its efficiency.

The Problem

The fishermen in the study area benefit from the social security measures - Social Assistance and Social Insurance - of the government. However, they still struggle in abject poverty. What still leaves them in such pitiable conditions? Is it the seasonal nature of their work or the perishable nature of their landings or the absence of regulated markets for their produce or the exploitive local money lending systems or something else? What is the role of social security measures in this given nature of fishermen? The questions further go on in the following manner: Is there sufficient social welfare schemes given to the nature of their work? Should the policy makers think of other special programs for the socio-economic

development of the fisherfolk? To what extent the fisherfolk had benefited meaningfully from these schemes all these years? The present study is an attempt to find fitting answers to the above questions.

Profile of the study area

Kanyakumari District (K.K. Dt) is situated in the southern extremity of the Indian Peninsula. This has a coastline of 71.5 kms: East coast is of 11.5 kms, (Arockiapuram to Periakadu) and West coast is of 60 kms (Rajakkamangalam to Neerodi). The estimated population of fisherfolk here is 186876 in the year 2008-09. There are 47 marine fishing villages in K.K. District with one active fishing harbour, three major fishing landing centers and 42 minor fish landing centers. The major landings of marine fishes are Sardine, Mackerels, Cuttle fishes, White baits, Ribbon fish, Seer fish and Rock perches. K.K. District has 42 Fishermen Co-operative Societies with 61964 members and 37 Fisherwomen Co-operative Societies with 22808 members. It has Six Assistant Director of Fisheries Offices through which all the welfare schemes are disbursed to the fishermen in K.K. District.

Objectives

The general objective of the paper is to analyze the effectiveness of the social security measures available for the fisherfolk in K.K. District. The specific objectives are:

- To know the different types of fishermen welfare schemes,
- To analyze the trend of fund allocation to the fishermen from 2006 to 2009 and

- To offer suitable suggestions to the policy makers in effective implementation of the schemes.

Data on Marine Fishermen Welfare schemes

The Government of Tamilnadu has undertaken various welfare schemes for the socio-economic uplift of marine fishermen

in the past sixty years and it has allocated Rs.193 crores in its latest budget of 2010(www.tnrd.gov.in). Welfare scheme in Tamil Nadu covers both social assistance and social insurance schemes. The following table presents the various schemes implemented by the government from 2006 to 2009 and its beneficiaries in the study area

Table-1

FisherFolk welfare Schemes

S.No	Name of the Scheme	Year	No of beneficiaries	Relief Amount
1	National Fishermen Savings-Cum Relief Scheme	2006-07	31147	36083250
		2007-08	28532	33515250
		2008-09	25475	30152475*
2	Tamil Nadu State Fisher Women Savings Cum Relief Scheme	2006-07	8169	9802800
		2007-08	12413	14699250
		2008-09	12736	15189450*
3	Daily Assistance To Missing Fisheries Family While On Fishing At Sea	2008-09	7	149550
		2009-10	14	3,48,700
4	Fishing Ban Period Relief Assistance	2007-08	24744	12372000
		2008-09	22898	11449000*
5	Fishermen Group Accident Insurance Scheme/Central/State Scheme	2006-07	16	725000
		2007-08	10	450000
		2008-09	3	150000
6	Fishermen Personal Accident Insurance Scheme	2006-07	3	300000
		2007-08	10	950000
		2008-09	2	200000
7	Mechanization Of Traditional Crafts	2007-08	101	2020000
8	Supply Of Two Wheeler With Ice Box To Inland Fishermen	2008-09	20	146470
9	Up gradation Of Skills In Maritime Education	2007-08	1	50000
10	Welfare Board Assistance For Education	2008-09	11	22250
11	Welfare Board Assistance For Marriage	2008-09	69	237000

Source: Assistant Fisheries Office, Nagercoil

* Disbursement is still continued

Table-2

Tsunami 2nd Phase Additional Relief Material Distribution

S.No	Items Distributed	No of Beneficiaries
1	Cycle	8234
2	Medical Kits	8236
3	Life Jackets	25971
4	Lantern	8211
5	Ice box	7585
6	Cash assistance for net Rs.6000/-	7864
7	Cash assistance for net Rs.4000/-	4177

Source: Assistant Fisheries Office, Nagercoil

Discussions

The data indicates that the allotment of funds in various government schemes is not in proportion to the inhabitants of costal area of the district. As per Marine Fisheries Census 2005, the total population of fisherfolk is 1, 48,539 with 76,796 males (51.70 Per cent) and 71,743 females (48.30 per cent). While the number of active fishermen in the study area stands 41,929(54.60 per cent), the number of beneficiaries, even in the inclusive schemes like *National Fishermen Savings -Cum-Relief Scheme*, is not reaching an average of 28,385 fishermen.

Secondly, what is considered already as an insufficient fund allotment is not further disbursed effectively. Item 4 in the table indicates that the fund of *Fishing Ban Period Relief Assistance* of 2009 is still

continued, after two years, to be distributed as only 22,898 of the 24,744 beneficiaries have received relief amount to the tune of Rs. 1,14,49,000/-. We may understand better the above difficulty if we pay attention to the functioning of *Tamil Nadu Fishermen Welfare Board* that was established on 29th June 2007 for the welfare of people in fishing and fishery allied activities. The initial work of membership enrollment is not even done effectively. Of the 49,200 forms issued to the marine fishermen only 27,500 members have enrolled while, only 727 members have enrolled of the 6353 forms issued to inland fish workers. Staff data indicates that there is no separate staff assigned for this work till date. One other significant factor is that of lack of awareness. There is no proper mechanism to inform and educate the fisher folk on the available welfare schemes.

Further, the welfare schemes have very long and cumbersome procedures that many active fishermen are not able to avail it. It is paradoxical that an active fisherman has to forgo one week of work to get an assistance of a very meager amount like Rs.500. Item 1 and 2 in the table prove this very clearly as there is a significant sloping down every year in the *National Fishermen Savings -Cum-Relief Scheme* while the *Fisherwomen Savings Cum Relief Fund* has a positive trend.

Table 2 shows certain timely welfare measures extended to the costal people by government during events like Tsunami. However, Tsunami event has significantly affected certain other regular welfare schemes of the government. The government has stopped allotment of *Free Houses Scheme* in the coastal villages from 2005-06 onwards as other individuals and NGOs have built houses for the fishermen either in the Government property or Church property. On the other hand, Government has increased its safety measures after Tsunami which seems to have a positive impact in reducing the disbursements under *Group and Personal Accident Insurance Scheme* from 19 in 2006-07 to 5 in 2008-09. However, *Daily Assistance to Missing Fisheries Family Scheme* shows an opposite trend. While, seven households of the fishermen family received a sum of Rs.1,49,550/- in 2008-09, there were 14 households in 2009-10 to receive the same benefit to the worth of Rs.3, 48,700/-, indicating that the conditions of safety have not improved significantly.

Findings and Suggestions

The following could be placed as major reasons for the abject poverty of the costal people with all possible efforts and welfare schemes of the government:

- The allotment of funds in various government schemes is very significantly low in proportion to the inhabitants of costal area of the district.
- The lengthy and cumbersome procedures of the welfare schemes are not fishermen friendly.
- Lack of effective systems to inform, educate and then to execute the welfare schemes.
- Lack of awareness of the scheme offered by the government for the people of the locality

From the above findings the following could be placed as possible methods to be adapted for an effective execution of social security to the costal people in the study area:

- The State and Central Governments should allocate more funds that are in proportion to the costal population in the succeeding Five Year Plans.
- It is important that newer and varied schemes be evolved keeping in mind the unpredictable nature of their works and to evolve alternative job opportunities schemes, particularly during the

fishing ban period and during the time of natural disturbances like cyclone and rain.

- The Government should create mechanisms for creating awareness of the schemes and for effective execution of the same.
- The Non-Governmental organization like Coastal Peace and Development (CPD), Kanyakumari District Fishermen Sangam's Federation (KDFSF), Shanthidhan can play an effective role in creating awareness and help to reduce the cumbersome procedural struggles in acquiring the benefit from the governments.
- Political representation is very essential to this less privileged people. There must be representatives from fishermen to the parliament so as to enhance policy making which will be realistic and effective.
- This present study is limited in terms of area and timeframe (K.K. District and Three years from 2006 to 2009). The findings are interesting and a future scope in this regard can be to assess the social security measures for fisher folk throughout Tamilnadu taking a longer timeframe.

Conclusion

It is unfortunate that the fisherfolk who contribute to the GDP of our country to the tune of 1.4% continue to live in abject poverty. What is more pitiable is that the well intended welfare schemes of the government in the last 60 years have not been properly utilized due to reasons like disproportionate fund allocation, lack of mechanism to execute it, the cumbersome nature of schemes and lack of awareness. The fishermen of Kanyakumari are very much known for deep sea fishing and highly talented. India which aims to compete in the world should make use of the resources of fisherman to the nation. The accelerated development of marine fishing industry depends mainly on the socio-economic well being of the fisherfolk, who are the heart and soul of this industry. Considering this, efforts should be taken to increase the social security measures that safeguard the socio-economic development of the fisher folk. The very nature of their work, which is seasonal, unpredictable and perishable, demands that the governments have moral responsibilities to create better social security measures for fisherfolk that are effective and efficient. Without much of political representation they stand helpless as often as they stand before the mighty sea. We have no control over the natural forces with which the fisherfolk toil and fight day and night but we do have power over the welfare schemes and social security measures.

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