

Marketing Challenges Faced by Poor Fishermen Communities of Rural Bangladesh

Sk Mashudur Rahman*

Abstract

In Bangladesh, there are many indigenous fishing communities who depend on fishing as their chief sources of livelihood. In the past, they faced no problems for accessing the open water bodies. But during the last few decades, due to marketing issues, siltation of rivers, and wetlands, involvement of non-indigenous fishermen in fishing, indigenous fishermen are shifting their traditional occupations at an alarming rate and are facing a very miserable economic condition. The gradual but definite extinction of such indigenous communities is a great loss to the country. 250 respondents from the Bagdi, Rajbangshi, Malo, Julla and Barman fishermen communities were selected randomly. Siltation of rivers, canals and wetlands, difficulties arising from influential or non fishermen for taking lease of open water bodies from the government, lack of friendly institution of financial support are the main challenges for the indigenous fishermen communities.

Key Words: Poverty, Fishermen community, Livelihoods, and Marketing.

Introduction

Bangladesh is the world's eighth most populous country. The country's maritime territory in the Bay of Bengal is roughly equal to the size of its land area. It shares land borders with India and Myanmar (Burma) and is situated in the delta of the Brahmaputra, Meghna, and Ganges rivers. The total land area of Bangladesh is 147 570 km² and out of them 4.56 million hectare is covered with an an extensive water resources in the form of ponds, natural depressions, lakes, canals, rivers and estuaries (DoF, 2005). And from time immemorial, a large number of fresh water based Bengali indigenous fishermen have depended for their livelihood on fishing and related activities. The approximate number of these indigenous fishermen is 1.4 million (Shah, 2003). Indigenous fishermen in rural Bangladesh usually live a community life in neighbourhoods or villages

* Joint Director, Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), Kotbari, Comilla

around the water bodies. Traditionally, indigenous fishermen have been Hindus. For Hindus, fishing is generally hereditary and has a traditional link with the caste system. Hindu fishermen believe their occupation to be sacred. People who pursue fishing or related occupations can be grouped into different social categories. Hindu fishermen are formed into separate and distinct castes. The indigenous fishermen communities that are found among the Hindus are-Kaibartta/Kavivarta, Kewat, Mala/Jhala/Malo/Jhala, Tiyar/Tiwar (Rajbangsi), Das Shikari (Rajbansi origin), Berua (Namasudra sub-caste), Jiani (Namasudra sub-caste in Bakarganj & Faridpur), Karal/Charal (sub-caste of Namasudra)*¹, Bind/Bindu, Bagdi, Patni (ferryman), Nadial, Mali/Bhualim, Gonrhi/Gunhri/Mallah, Banpar (sub-caste of Gonrhi), Lohait/Lohait-Kuri, Muriari/Mariyari/Mariyari, Mala (possible Kewat connection) and Surahiya/Kalwat-Mallah. On the other hand, the indigenous fishermen communities that are found among the Muslims are Mahefarosh*, Chaklai*, Datiya/Dalatiya*, Dhawa/Katwar, Gutiya Jelia, Nikari*, Jiani (Nikari in Rajshahi)*, Abdal (branch of Bebajiya), Bebajiya/Bediya/Mal Baidya, Dohuriya, Kunjara/Kunjra*, Dom-Patni, Dohariya/Dohuriya*, Pajar/Pajhra/Pajara (possibly Nikari), Chandali/Musulman Bagdi, Machhua, Mahimal/Maimal/Mahemahol (Chufa Tsai and M. Youssouf Ali, 1997). Fresh water based Indigenous fishermen of Bangladesh depend on both fishing and crop cultivation for their living. However, most fishermen are primarily dependent on fishing. They use simple and traditional fishing equipment. For fishing in the inland waters the fishermen use non-motorised boats and traditional nets. The only touch of modern technology is the recent use of nylon nets.

Objectives of the study

The overall objective of this paper is to assess the contemporary situation of some fresh water based indigenous fisherman communities. The specific objectives of the study are -

- a. Analyse the existing occupation pattern of indigenous fishermen community;
- b. Identification of challenges faced by indigeneous fishermen; and
- c. Issues faced by fishermen communities in marketing their produce.

Reserach Methodology

In this study, several techniques of data collection were followed to collect information. The sample size of the study was 250 as primary respondents and two stages stratified random sampling method was used. The first stage was Upazilas of selected districts and the second stage was the villages. After selecting villages, all the households of indigenous fishermen were listed by with respects to villagers. Thus the study covered a total of 5 indigenous fishermen occupied villages. Among these indigenous

¹ Astrix star denotes fish selling communities.

fishermen communities, Bagdi, Rajbonshi and Malo community were covered in Manikganj district of Dhaka division and Julla and Barman community were selected in Comilla district of Chittagang Division.

Results and Discussion

Occupation Pattern of the Indigenous Fisherman

There is a co-relation between traditional occupation and poor economic condition. In the past the professional activities of indigenous fishermen were limited to certain specific professions. They had little scope to come out of that professional circle because of their social and economic position in the society. Once upon a time they solely depended on the fishing but now days they are involved in many non-fishing activity as a main source of income. The following table presents the main professional activities of indigenous fishermen communities. In the present time, the study respondents have shifted to various professions for their livelihood. Earlier they had limited scope to choose alternative professions. From the above table it is understandable that most of the fishermen's main source of income and livelihoods are either agriculture or fishing. Some of them have other occupations. From this table we can find that out of 1086 family members, 28.27% are directly involved in catching fish. Nearly 50% of the total family members are housewives and students and they spend a significant amount of time for fish related diverse occupations such as making nets or helping during catching fish. The significant aspect of this table is that 11.82% family members among the Rajbonshi depend on making fish equipments with bamboo.

Table-1: Main Occupational Patten of the Household Members

Occupational Status	Fresh Water based Indigenous Fishermen Community					Total Number (%)
	Bagdi (%)	Rajbonshi (%)	Malo (%)	Julla (%)	Barman (%)	
Catching fish	53 (24.31)	57 (28.08)	51 (27.27)	73 (31.60)	73 (29.55)	307 (28.27)
Making fish equipment with bamboo(Banari)	1 (0.46)	24 (11.82)	-	-	-	25 (2.30)
Student	23 (10.55)	61 (30.05)	52 (27.81)	47 (20.35)	56 (22.67)	239 (22.01)
House wife	72 (33.03)	26 (12.81)	53 (28.34)	67 (29.00)	67 (27.13)	285 (26.24)
Petty business	2	8	5	8	10	33

	(0.92)	(3.94)	(2.67)	(3.46)	(4.05)	(3.04)
Service	5 (2.29)	2 (0.99)	10 (5.35)	4 (1.73)	5 (2.02)	26 (2.39)
Masonry	2 (0.92)	1 (0.49)	-	-	2 (0.81)	5 (0.46)
Remittance	2 (0.92)	1 (0.49)	-	2 (0.87)	2 (0.81)	7 (0.64)
Day Laborer	6 (2.75)	0 (0.00)	-	14 (6.06)	9 (3.64)	29 (2.67)
Rikasa/Van/CN G Driver	1 (0.46)	1 (0.49)	-	1 (0.43)	3 (1.21)	6 (0.55)
Blacksmith	3 (1.38)	-	-	-	-	3 (0.28)
Carpenter	6 (2.75)	-	2 (1.07)	-	-	8 (0.74)
Barber	13 (5.96)	-	-	-	-	13 (1.20)
Agriculture	3 (1.38)	-	2 (1.07)	-	-	5 (0.46)
Unemployment	1 (0.46)	1 (0.49)	-	2 (0.87)	5 (2.02)	9 (0.83)
Children	25 (11.47)	21 (10.34)	12 (6.42)	13 (5.63)	15 (6.07)	86 (7.92)
Total	218 (100.00)	203 (100.00)	187 (100.00)	231 (100.00)	247 (100.00)	1086 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey, 2014

3.04% depend on petty business, 2.67% depend on day labor and only 2.39 % depend on services. The occupation of masonry, CNG (Compressed Natural Gas) driving, barbering, carpenter was also found among the fishermen community but the ratio was very poor. It is clear that the members of all the five surveyed communities had a major shift in their profession, but they still could not improve their social or economic condition from these new sources of earning. Their social status remained the same and their economy is still no better than subsistence economy.

Marketing Challenges Faced by Poor Fishermen Communities

For their marginal economic condition, they are still looked down upon and it is still difficult for them to run their family affairs.

Table-2: Secondary Occupational Status of the Household Members

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Occupational Status	Fresh Water based Indigenous Fishermen Community					Total Number (%)
	Bagdi (%)	Raj bonshi (%)	Malo (%)	Julla (%)	Barman (%)	
Preparing Banar	-	52 (75.36)	-	-	-	52 (26.80)
Catching fish	63 (86.30)	8 (11.59)	7 (36.84)	4 (18.18)	2 (18.18)	84 (43.30)
Carpenter	-	2 (2.90)	0 (0.00)	-	-	2 (1.03)
Petty business	-	1 (1.45)	9 (47.37)	4 (18.18)	4 (36.36)	18 (9.28)
Masonary	-	1 (1.45)	0 (0.00)	1 (4.55)	0 (0.00)	2 (1.03)
Day Laborer	5 (6.85)	-	1 (5.26)	12 (54.55)	2 (18.18)	20 (10.31)
Rikasa/Van/ CNG	1 (1.37)	-	2 (10.53)	1 (4.55)	1 (9.09)	5 (2.58)
Agriculture	2 (2.74)	5 (7.25)	-	-	-	7 (3.61)
Poultry rearing	1 (1.37)	-	-	-	-	1 (0.52)
Service	-	-	-	-	1(9.09)	1(0.52)
Making net	1 (1.37)	-	-	-	-	1 (0.52)
Fish drying	-	-	-	-	1 (9.09)	1 (0.52)
Total	73 (100.00)	69 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	22 (100.00)	11 (100.00)	194 (100.00)

From the above table, we can find that most of the family members are involved in catching fish and preparing the fishing equipment as the secondary source of income. Petty business that is mostly related with

fishing is another secondary source of income of 9.28% family members. Most of the fishermen have that skill how to repair the fishing net instantly. It is evident from the above data that these communities had very little scope for economic activities for earning their livelihood. Their earning activities centered on the traditional profession of their forefathers. With the changing scenario of the country, these professional minorities gradually have diversified their earning activities by adopting some secondary professions too.

Issues Faced by the Indigenous Fishermen

At present destructive use of fishing gear, water pollution, siltation, rapid urbanization and human encroachment are major challenges for the indigenous fishermen communities.

Table-3: Problems Faced in Fishing by Indegenous Community

Problems	Fresh Water based Indigenous Fishermen Community					Total Number (%)
	Bagdi (%)	Rajbons hi (%)	Malo (%)	Julla (%)	Barman (%)	
Not applicable	-	18 (21.69)	1 (2.00)	2 (2.06)	3 (5.17)	24 (6.67)
Fishing by the other caste	7 (9.72)	7 (8.43)	(8.00)	15 (15.46)	6 (10.34)	39 (10.83)
High fund needed for lease	3 (4.17)	12 (14.46)	3 (6.00)	12 (12.37)	3 (5.17)	33 (9.17)
Other caste people also participate in the process of taking lease	2 (2.78)	10 (12.05)	2 (4.00)	14 (14.43)	4 (6.90)	32 (8.89)
Seine net used for fishing in various places	-	4 (4.82)	4 (8.00)	11 (11.34)	2 (3.45)	21 (5.83)
Faced by the influential	6 (8.33)	16 (19.28)	9 (18.00)	15 (15.46)	5 (8.62)	51 (14.17)
Pay of extra tax in case of fishing	-	2 (2.41)	3 (6.00)	8 (8.25)	-	13 (3.61)
Blockage by leaser	23 (31.94)	-	3 (6.00)	-	-	26 (7.22)
Lack of modern fishing equipments	17 (23.61)	-	-	-	-	17 (4.72)
Less fish in water	4	-	--	-	-	4

Marketing Challenges Faced by Poor Fishermen Communities

	(5.56)					(1.11)
Problem of minority	5 (6.94)	2 (2.41)	3 (6.00)	3 (3.09)	4 (6.90)	17 (4.72)
There is no problem	5 (6.94)	12 (14.46)	18 (36.00)	17 (17.53)	31 (53.45)	83 (23.06)
Total	72 (100)	(83100)	50 (100)	97 (100)	58 (100)	360 (100)

Source: Field Survey, 2014

The government and non-government initiatives also should come forward to consider these negative impacts and develop such techniques or alternatives that may help at least the poor fishermen to uphold the present profession of fishing. Some obstacles that are faced by the fishermen are presented in the above table. From the above table, it is found that out of 250 respondents, nearly 14% faced by local elites 10.83% of the respondents mention that now a day's fish is caught by other segments of people. 9.17% of the respondents mention that a huge amount of funds is needed during lease. Because of poverty, they are incapable of meeting the expected lease demand. About 9% respondents point out that other castes of people also participate in the process of taking lease. The rest of the respondents mention other difficulties including blockage by leaser, seine net used for fishing in various places, lack of modern fishing equipments, paying extra tax in case of fishing, problem of minority, insufficient fish in water bodies and so on. The interesting point is that nearly 23% respondents identify that they have no problem regarding fish and 6.67% of the respondents kept silent on this issue.

Table-4: Faced Difficulties in Fish Selling

Problems	Fresh Water based Indigenous Fishermen Community					Total Number (%)
	Bagdi	Rajbonsh	Malo	Julla	Barman	
There is no problem	49 (98.00)	32 (64.00)	42 (77.78)	43 (86.00)	44 (84.62)	210 (82.03)
Stealing by laborer	1 (2.00)	-	-	2 (4.00)	-	3 (1.17)
Lack of ice plant	-	-	-	2 (4.00)	-	2 (0.78)
Low price	-	-	4 (7.41)	1 (2.00)	-	5 (1.95)
Lack of cold storage	-	-	3 (5.56)	-	-	3 (1.17)
Lack of icing facilities on	-	-	4 (7.41)	-	-	4 (1.56)

boat/ vessel						
Local vandors do not offer the fair price	-	-	-	-	3 (5.77)	3 (1.17)
Stockiest or wholesale pay low price	-	-	-	-	2 (3.85)	2 (0.78)
Not applicable	-	18 (36.00)	1 (1.85)	2 (4.00)	3 (5.7)7	24 (9.38)
Total	50 (100)	50 (100)	54 (100)	50 (100)	52 (100)	256 (100)

Source: Field Survey, 2014

The above table indicates that nearly 82% of the respondents mention that they do not face any problem for selling fish while 9.38% of the respondents kept silent for answering this question. And the rest respondents (10%) point out many difficulties for selling fish and these are lack of icing facilities on boat/ vessel, stealing by the laborer, lack of cold storage, absence of fair price in local fish markets, lack of ice plant and stockiest or wholesale pay low price. Side by side indigenous fishermen identify some root causes for fish marketing through focus group discussion and these are

Root Causes for Poor Fish Marketing

- a. Inappropriate environment for fishing for catching quality fish;
- b. Real fishermen are deprived by other caste of people/Muslims who participate in the process of leasing system;
- c. No regulation for illegal fishing by other caste of people/ Muslims;
- d. Low price of produced fishes; and
- e. Lack of storage or preservation.

Access to open water-body is another important phenomenon for catching fish. The following tables will highlight- the current accessing status of the indigenous fishermen for going to the outside area of their own territory for fishing.

Major Hindrance of Fishery Occupation

Indigenous fishermen face many hindrances to fishing. Some of the major hindrances that they face are mentioned in the following table. The major hindrances of fishing are lack of improvement in traditional method of fishing and dominance of non-mechanized boats in riverine fishing. It was found in the study that lack of proper or modern equipment has a negative impact on almost all the studied communities. The other issues are fish scarcity in river or marshy area, challenging and hard working fishing environment, siltation, absence of adequate marketing facilities which makes fishing comparatively less profitable than other professions. Another important issue that came out in the study was leaseholder's oppression.

Table-5: Main Hindrance of Fishery Occupation

Major Obstacles	Fresh Water based Indigenous Fishermen Community					Total Number (%)
	Bagdi	Rajbons	Malo	Julla	Barman	
Lack of proper equipment	43 (22.63)	30 (19.11)	21 (10.61)	7 (3.63)	13 (6.84)	114 (12.28)
Fish scarcity in river or marshy area	49 (25.79)	50 (31.85)	50 (25.25)	49 (25.39)	49 (25.79)	247 (26.62)
This is hard task	9 (4.74)	15 (9.55)	45 (22.73)	43 (22.28)	39 (20.53)	151 (16.27)
Siltation	49 (25.79)	50 (31.85)	45 (22.73)	47 (24.35)	50 (26.32)	241 (25.97)
Fishing is	11	12	37	47	39	146
Leaseholder' oppression	29 (15.26)	-	-	-	-	29 (3.13)
Total	190 (100)	157 (100)	198 (100)	193 (100)	190 (100)	928 (100)

Source: Field Survey, 2014 *

More than one answer by single respondent During Focus Group Discussion fishermen from the five respective communities mentioned the following socio-economic hindrances:

- a. Absence of effective production/marketing related cooperatives for fishermen
- b. Absence of institutional credit facilities
- c. Dependency of fishermen on traders, local storage keepers, village moneylenders, boat owners for loans at usurious rates of interest.
- d. Loans of *aratdars* and traders are tied up with compulsory sell to them.
- e. Dissatisfaction of fishermen about the existing system of cash support as remuneration in riverine fishing
- f. Lack of capacity to procure fishing inputs such as boats and nets from own financial resources
- g. Lack of preservation facilities resulting in spoilage/wastage particularly during bumper catch
- h. No insurance coverage for life and fishing equipments
- i. Prevalence of leasing-out system of water bodies and creation of large number of intermediaries between first lessee and ultimate user, the fishermen.

- j. Unlicensed fishing and use of destructive gear
- k. Increasing inflow of fishermen to the fishery versus gradual decline of production due to over-exploitation of fishery and decline of productivity
- l. Pollution resulting from use of agrochemicals and discharge of industrial effluent and resulting threat to the existence of fish resources

Conclusion

Main source of income and livelihoods is either agriculture or fishing. Family members among the Rajbonshi also depend on making fish equipments with bamboo. With the changing scenario of the country, these professional minorities have diversified their earning activities by adopting some secondary professions too. The destructive use of fishing gear, water pollution, siltation, rapid urbanization and human encroachment are major challenges for the indigenous fishermen communities. They also faced difficulties for selling fish due to lack of icing facilities on boat/vessel, stealing by the laborer, lack of cold storage, absence of fair price in local fish markets, lack of ice plant and low wholesale price. The major hindrances in good fishing are lack of improvement in traditional method of fishing and dominance of non-mechanized boats in riverine fishing. The other issues are fish scarcity in river, risky and hard working involved in fishing, siltation, absence of adequate marketing facilities and leaseholder's oppression.

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