

## Traditional fisheries

## Along the Konkan coast

**The *rampani* fishermen of the Konkan coast of India have convenient and environmentally sustainable fishing practices**

**T**he shore or beach seine operated along the Malabar and Konkan coasts of India is locally known as *rampani*. The *rampani* fishery is a seasonal one, lasting for about six months from August to January. The main fish species caught are Indian mackerel, Indian oil sardine and ribbonfish.

In the Konkan coast, the gear is concentrated in Sindhudurg district, an important centre for traditional fisheries. The south Konkan coast is characterized by long sandy beaches, shallow waters, a wide continental shelf and mild currents, all conditions that have helped the fisheries to develop in a sustainable manner.

The traditional *rampani* is around 800-1,000 m long, made by joining together pieces of netting. Both ends of the net are narrower and feature a larger mesh size. Towards the centre, the height of the net increases, while its mesh size decreases. Generally, the net is divided into three parts: *karal* (around 16 pieces), *modan* (around 8 pieces) and *ghol* (around 8 pieces). The *karal* and *modan* are at the ends of the net, while the *ghol* is the central portion.

The *rampani* net is collectively owned by 30 to 40 fishermen, who become owners according to their contributions in the form of pieces of net or monetary input. These fishermen become permanent members of the collective. Some temporary members may be included on a daily pay basis. The *rampani* group of fishermen is called *rampani sangh* and each village has two or three *sanghs*, depending on its population. The functioning of the *rampani sangh* is controlled by a headman called *mukadam*. He is responsible for storing all assets of the *rampani sangh*, inclusion of temporary

members, decisions about the operation of the net, and so on. He also forms teams comprising eight to 10 fishermen from among the *sangh* members, allocating turns to those who will go out to sea to pay the net on a rotation basis, such that each team gets its turn after a gap of three or four days. The financial affairs of the *sangh* are looked upon by another person, a treasurer called *hundiwala*, who can be changed by the *sangh*. He is responsible for paying wages to temporary members, keeping records of earnings, showing the account to members, and distributing the earnings to them during meetings held every two or three months in a shed located near the shore.

The *rampani* net is generally operated near the shore, at about 4 fathoms depth. At the start of the operation, a person is sent out in a small boat to look for, and signal, the arrival of fish shoals. He locates the shoal based on the colour of the water. Immediately on sighting a shoal, he shouts out a signal, on hearing which net-laden craft called *hoda* set out to pay the net in a semi-circular fashion, encircling the shoal. One end of the net is handed over to a group of fishermen on the shore and the other end of the rope is brought to another point on the shore. The net is then dragged in by both the groups of fishermen.

### Rotation system

Rotation is a characteristic feature of this fishery. If there are several *rampani sanghs* operating on the same stretch of shore during the season, each of them gets a turn to fish. This rotation system is based on mutual understanding and is strictly binding on all *rampani sanghs*. Each *sangh* wait for its turn by keeping the net-laden craft anchored near the shore, adjacent to the *sangh* that is already fishing. When their turn comes, the fishermen again go

out in a dinghy to the craft, bring it back, and hand one end of the rope to fishermen on the shore to lay the net.

**A**fter landing, the catch is sorted. Some proportion of it is set aside for self-consumption and the rest is auctioned at the beach. If there are no middlemen present at the time, the catch is equally distributed among the members. The members either consume the catch themselves, give it to other people or sell it. If there is a huge amount of catch and it is late in the evening or night, the net is not hauled in entirely but only up to the edge of the shore, and both ends of the rope are brought together and tied to the boat or any other fixed object. The net is then hauled in in the morning, when the catch is auctioned.

A fixed amount of money from the auction is kept aside as working capital and for maintenance costs. The rest is distributed equally among the members, except for the head of the *sangh*, who gets 50 per cent more than the ordinary members.

Over time, the fishermen operating the *rampani* shore seine in Sindhudurg have developed effective ways of resource management that are environmentally sustainable and convenient.

This article has been written by Vivek Nirmale (vivekkop10@usa.net), Senior Research Fellow, and Santosh Metar (santoshmetar@usa.net), Ph.D scholar, Central Institute of Fisheries Education (CIFE), Mumbai