

Workshop

Aim for sound principles

This is a summary of the recommendations of the workshop on “Post-tsunami Rehabilitation of Fisheries in Nagapattinam District”

A workshop on the post-tsunami rehabilitation of fisheries in Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu, India was organized by the Department of Fisheries, Government of Tamil Nadu, in collaboration with the Non-governmental Organization (NGO) Co-ordination Centre at the District Collectorate Conference Hall on 13 March 2005.

The workshop was attended by over 150 persons; at least 100 were from the various NGOs involved in rehabilitation activities in Nagapattinam District. In addition, several officials from the Department of Fisheries, leaders from the fishing community, and media representatives attended.

The following recommendations were made:

Fleet size/fishing capacity

Given that the fish resources on the continental shelf are already exploited close to the level of the maximum potential yield and that the fish catches of Tamil Nadu are stagnating for the last few years, increasing the size of the fishing fleet to beyond pre-tsunami levels could lead to overcapitalization, uneconomic operations and even resource depletion. Hence, it is strongly recommended that the fishing fleet should not be increased beyond the pre-tsunami level.

The upgradation of *kattumarams* to motorized fibre-reinforced plastic (FRP) boats should not be encouraged in the rehabilitation phase.

Motorization of small boats is an ongoing process and needs to take place at its own pace, ensuring that fishing is economical at all stages and fish resource exploitation is not beyond safe levels. If upgradation

is encouraged in the rehabilitation phase, it could lead to indiscriminate distribution of fishing assets.

The trawl fleet of Nagapattinam, as well as that of Tamil Nadu, is overcapitalized and has been struggling to work profitably in the last few years. In such a situation, even a return to the pre-tsunami fleet size is not advisable. As some trawler owners are themselves willing to shift to alternative employment, it may be advisable to make modifications to the package of financial assistance announced by the government.

The financial assistance of Rs300,000 (US\$6,847) for partially damaged boats and Rs500,000 (US\$11,429) for fully damaged boats must also be given to boatowners who are willing to quit trawling operations and move into alternative livelihoods, whether fishery-based or non-fishery-based. In this case, the Department of Fisheries should ensure that new trawlers are not introduced subsequently, nullifying the effect of some trawlers leaving the fishery.

Role of NGOs

The NGOs/donors must be encouraged to partner with the government in the implementation of the financial package for replacement of damaged boats.

Since the government package only provides for 50 per cent subsidy for FRP boats and there exists no proper mechanism for recovery of bank loans, it is advisable for NGOs/donors to top up the government subsidy and help the concerned fishermen replace their lost fishing assets. The government may share its beneficiary lists with NGOs willing to partner it and encourage them to organize the supply of equipment in consultation with the concerned fishermen.

Independent distribution of fishing equipment by NGOs/donors parallel to the government package may not be advisable, and the Department of Fisheries should ensure that, to avoid such instances, NGOs are made aware of this, and it should work out registration formalities prior to the construction/supply of boats.

The component meant for rehabilitation of livelihoods as per Government Order No. 25 dealing with public-private partnership should not be used for distribution of boats or fishing equipment but for other forms of livelihood support. The District administration or State government may bring out guidelines in this regard.

Boat distribution to crew, group ownership

Distribution of boats to crew members with the intention of improving their lot should be strictly avoided in the rehabilitation phase as it will lead to proliferation of boats and uneconomic operations.

Such schemes completely ignore the fact that fishing incomes are shared and there is no wage labour in the Nagapattinam fishery. Group ownership in the name of equality is another impractical scheme and has not succeeded so far, despite many attempts in the past. This is another idea to be avoided in the rehabilitation phase.

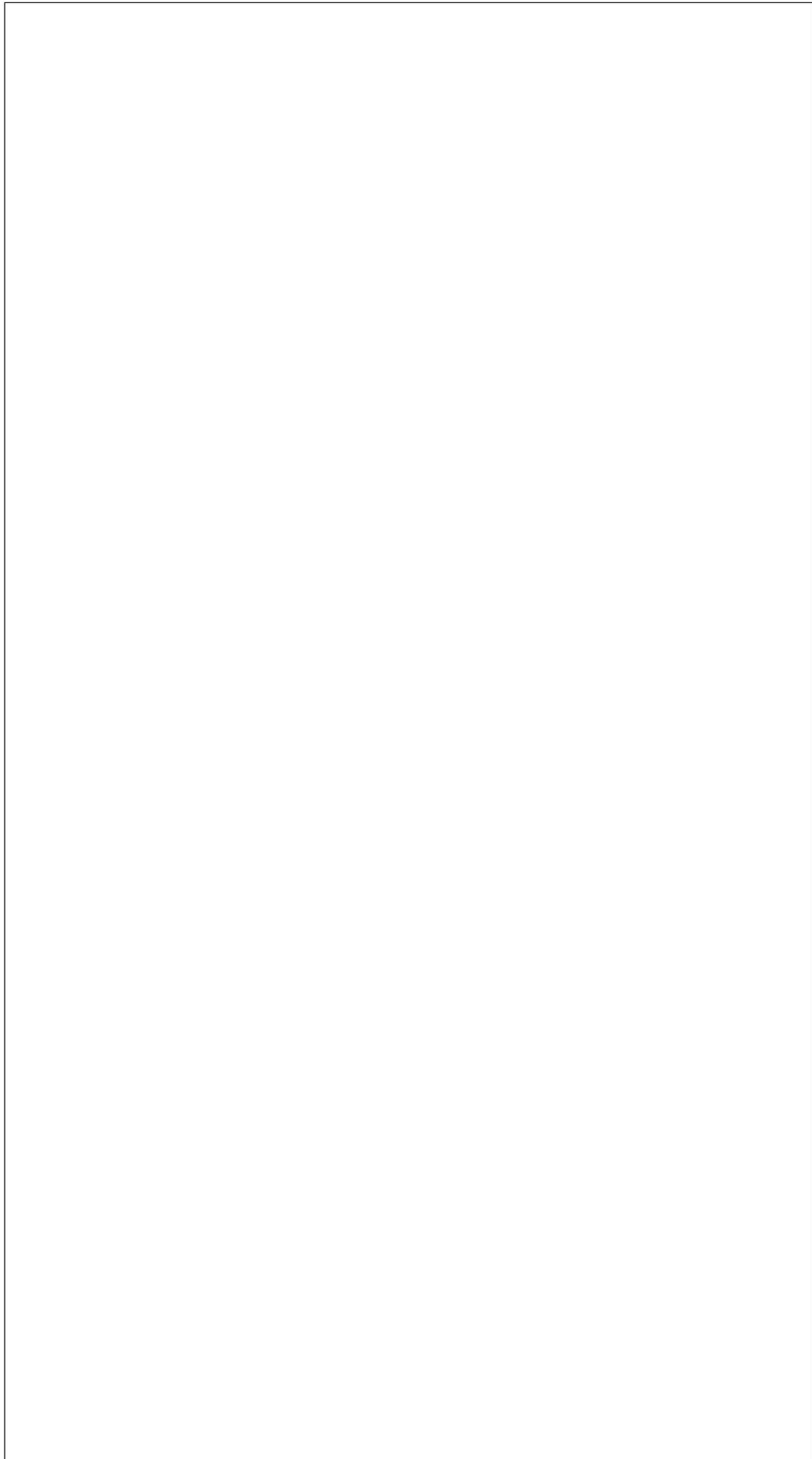
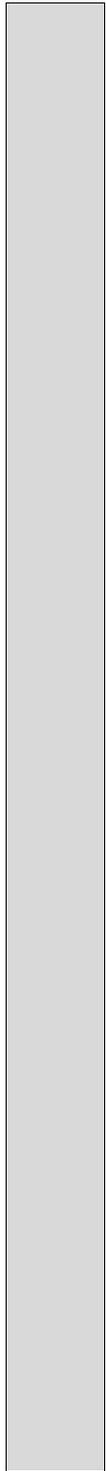
Deep-sea fishing

There is ample scope for deep-sea fishing beyond the continental shelf, off the Nagapattinam coast. This is testified by the success of a few groups of pioneering fishermen in Nagore who are using the Philippines' fish aggregating device called *payao* to attract tuna and other fishes at a distance of 35-40 km from the shore. The operations of the Sri Lankan multi-day fishing boats that use gillnets and longlines are also testimony to this.

However, various ingredients, including enhancement of endurance and storage capacity of the boats, improvement to onboard handling of fish, and processing and marketing arrangements, have to be in place for deep-sea fishing to take off. The Department of Fisheries, central scientific institutions and technically capable NGOs should collaborate to develop a sound deep-sea fishing sector in Nagapattinam.

Deep-sea fishing, however, should be promoted on the basis of upgradation of the existing fleet of mechanized and motorized boats, rather than the introduction of so-called 'deep-sea' vessels from outside. Similarly, deep-sea fishing should be seen as an opportunity for those involved in fishing as a traditional occupation to improve their lot rather than as an investment opportunity for outside investors. Therefore, encouragement of deep-sea fishing

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should go hand in hand with caution to avoid the anarchic growth process of previous interventions like trawling.

While the initial steps needed for the development of deep-sea fishing should be taken early, large-scale promotion of deep-sea fishing without all the abovementioned ingredients being in place may not be advisable in the rehabilitation phase. The offer made by the Fishery Survey of India to organize a demonstration-cum-training event for deep-sea fishing off the Nagapattinam coast may be followed up.

Mariculture, post-harvest aspects

There are a number of proven technologies available with central scientific institutions for mariculture, like lobster fattening, mussel culture and pearl oyster culture. The Fisheries Department should develop a detailed site-specific plan in consultation with the central institutions for the promotion of suitable technologies, taking into account economic viability and social feasibility.

There is a need to improve the post-harvest and processing aspects. Training and other support activities to encourage women to use the low-cost and appropriate technologies available with the central scientific institutions may be taken up by NGOs and the Department of Fisheries. The Department of Fisheries and the NGO Co-ordination Centre may organize a separate programme for this.

Research, management

Various changes have perhaps taken place in the marine ecosystem as a result of the tsunami. Several scientific studies are currently under way to document and understand these changes. The Department of Fisheries should be in touch with the academic and scientific institutions concerned to collate all the results and make them available to the NGOs and fishing communities.

The tsunami has exposed the various limitations in the fisheries management system of the State. A good fisheries management system, based on sound principles and the participation of fishing communities, needs to be developed in the State at the earliest. The Department of Fisheries and NGOs with the relevant

expertise should collaborate in creating such a system.

General

The workshop records its appreciation of the openness of the District administration to ideas and suggestions from NGOs, fishing communities and scientists. Similar workshops and consultations should be organized on other relevant topics and sectors connected with the rehabilitation of tsunami-affected areas and communities. The NGO Co-ordination Centre may take the initiative to organize such programmes.

These recommendations were made at Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu, India, on 13 March 2005