

# Presentation

By: Tahira Ali Shah Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum



## **Introduction:**

The coastal belt is stretched on	1050 kms
Sindh coast is	350 kms
Balochistan coast is	700 kms
Fisher folk population in Pakistan	03 Million

## **Threats to livelihood at glance:**

1. Deep sea trawlers
2. Destructive nets
3. Marine pollution
4. Shortage of fresh water
5. Flow of agricultural as well as industrial fossils in the sea through World Bank funded projects Left Bank Outfall Drain (LBOD) and Right Bank Outfall Drain (RBOD)
6. Over-fishing caused by forced adoption of fishing profession by the pastoral communities due to shortage of water in the Indus River

## **Threats to livelihood in detail:**

### **Over- fishing**

In the past there were indigenous local ethics about fishing observed by the Fisherfolk communities. According to these practices fishing was done according to the sea tides and during certain fishing seasons. The centuries old fishing methods would disallow hunting during hatching season for the fish. Similarly, the traditional fishermen were careful not to catch small fish i.e. they would use net with big mesh size, which would automatically allow the small fish to pass through and flee. However, presently the

traditional ethics of fishing have been disregarded. In majority cases fishing is resorted to for 24 hours, which has resulted in the depletion of the fish resources.

### **Deep Sea Trawlers**

The government of Pakistan issues licenses to Deep Sea Factory Ship Trawlers frequently, which have destroyed fish stocks in the sea. These trawlers continue fishing day and night, giving no rest to the fish. In this process, these trawlers catch hundreds of tons of fish, which is small or unmarketable in the international markets. Considered as discards, these fish are again thrown in the sea dead or dying creating the menace of pollution in the coastal waters.

### **Destructive Nets**

Local people on the guidance of influential use destructive nets locally called as Boolo, Gujjo and Katro in the country coast. These nets have wiped out several fish species and forced hundreds of poor people to be jobless.

The newly introduced nylon and plastic fishing nets cause direct harm to the marine environment by damaging habitats, reducing cover from predators, depleting food supplies, and lowering local biological diversity. These nets are dangerous in the sense that their mesh size is so narrow that even the juvenile fish is easily caught in it.

Although Sindh Government has imposed ban on the use of these destructive nets in coastal creeks, the sea lords as well as some local influential fishermen still use these nets.

### **Marine Pollution**

About 300 million gallons urban sewerage are thrown in the coasts daily from Malir, Lyari, Cattle Colony, Landhi and Korangi sewerage channels.

Wastes from the Karachi industries are being discharged into the Arabian Sea through different water channels. In addition, Karachi Shipyard discharges considerable amounts of euphoric acid in its wastewater into the channel.

There are also indications of heavy metal leaching from the Pakistan Steel Mills Plant at Port Qasim. Oil also frequently spills

in the sea from the ships carrying oil. According to estimates about 37,000 tons of industrial waste are largely drained into sea daily.

### **LBOD/RBOD**

Indus delta creeks also receive agriculture affluent through the World Bank projects LBOD and RBOD containing dangerous pesticide ingredients from two sources. The main source is Indus River it self. The second source of agriculture run off including pesticide and salt water is the drainage project Left Bank Outfall Drain (LBOD). Estimated quantity of affluent discharge from LBOD is 5,200 cusec.

### **Over-population**

One of the basic causes of over-fishing is the fast growth in the population of indigenous fisherfolk. The rapid growth in the fisherfolk population can be assessed from the average number of children to each fisherfolk family. Each family has average 5 to 12 children. Due to lack of alternative livelihoods, the youngsters belonging to new generation certainly find their livelihoods in the common resources of sea, being exploited by their elders.

This certainly puts pressures on the fisheries livelihoods. However, the major population pressure on the coastal livelihoods came as a result of entry of the people, belonging to other livelihood sectors including agriculture and livestock holders, into the fisheries.

### **Indus Delta**

The first diversion of the major population towards the fishing sector was recorded with the decrease in the fresh water flow in the Indus delta after the commissioning of various barrages, reservoirs and dam on Indus River. Before the construction of such dams and barrages the delta area was criss-crossed by the distributaries of the Indus.

The discharge from the river was large enough to push back the ocean currents up to over a hundred miles from the shore. Due to this enormous quantity of fresh water and the silt the river brought with it, the delta lands were believed to be the richest in the area.

Agriculture was seasonal and the yields were high. Rice was the main crop and most of it was exported to the coastal regions of India and the Gulf.

However, with the reduction in fresh water flow major ecological changes took place, as a result of the sea moving into the delta channels. With the disappearance of Fresh River water, agriculture in the coastal belt became no longer possible.

According to a recent survey, due to decreased fresh water flow to the Indus Deltaic region from Indus River, the sea intrusion has inundated more than 1.2 million acres of farmland in the coastal areas of Thatta and Badin districts of Sindh province.

### **Decrease in Fish Catch**

Fishermen claim that a number of fish species, which were in abundance in the past have now become completely extinct due to above mentioned reasons. Palla -one of the best fish species of Sindh province has also drastically reduced over the years.

Basically, Palla is a marine fish specie but the reproductive urge instinctively diverts it from the Sea to swim up the Indus River for hundred of miles. Construction of barrages on Indus River and decline in Indus water flow in Deltaic region has resulted in almost depletion of this otherwise prized fish spicy.

Palla was reported as the single large species of fish accounting for 70% of the total catch in the past. But now it barely constitutes 15 percent of the total catch.

### **Changing Face of Fisheries Sector**

Before 1977, the fisheries resources were sustainable. Fishermen were few and there were plenty of fish resources. There was no burden on the coast as no outsiders (non-fisher folk communities) had yet entered the profession. The fisheries sector had not become commercialized and was considered as subsistent livelihoods till that time.

However, during the course the fisheries were converted into the profiteering sector a number of changes took place in the sector.

### **Influential Sea- Lords**

Non-fisherfolk influential tribal have occupied a number of Indus Delta Creeks, which are considered as the nurseries for fish species. These influential persons have posted their armed persons at the mouths of these creeks from Korangi Creek near Karachi to Sir Creek near Indian Border. These gunmen waste no



time in shooting at the boats of common fishermen in case they try to fish in these creeks. They have developed their own method of exploiting the fishermen.

Only such fishermen are allowed to catch fish, which toe their line. According to their terms and conditions for fishing in their occupied areas the fishermen have to handover their fish- catch to these influential on less than the half of the market price. These sea lords in their bid to exploit fishery resources have provided refuge to the illegal immigrants. They are recruited as laborer on the launches on very cheap remuneration.

### **Threats to Inland Fisheries**

There is worst ever water shortage in Indus River since last three to four years. This water shortage has worsened in the lower Indus Basin i.e. the areas of Sindh province. Due to water shortages the lakes of Sindh, which are considered as main sources of inland fisheries, have also been badly affected. Manchar Lake – one of the major lakes in Asia has reached at the level of inhalation.

Similarly other main fresh waters reservoirs of Sindh including Keenjhar, Bakar, and Sindh Dhoro as well as fresh water fish spots downstream Kotri Barrage have been degraded. The water level in these reservoirs has decreased to the level of threat to the existence of fish and other species.

Another major threat to the inland fisheries of Pakistan is the auction system under which the government auctions the fishing rights of various fishing waters including lakes and reservoirs. Previously fishing was done through license system in those waters. Fishing licenses carrying reasonable fees were issued to the indigenous fishermen to fish in those waters. However, since many years these fishing rights are sold through auction.

Under the so-called auction system, the fishing contracts are mostly given to the influential / political people, having no fishing livelihoods background. It is also a fact that the authorities of fisheries department often auction these waters secretly in place of holding open auctions. The indigenous fishermen have been continuing their protest demanding the restoration of license system.

The 'auction system' in the fresh water fisheries brings destruction to the fisheries livelihoods. The contractors usually resort to over fishing during their contract/ auction period so as to extract more and more gains from the contract. It has also been observed that the contractors use various dangerous chemicals in the fishing waters so as to catch major quantities of fish in the shortest possible time.

### **Impacts:**

1. The fertile soil of Indus Deltaic region have been completely degraded
2. Kati Bandar, Shah Bandar the main port of the past for the export of agricultural varieties, fruits, vegetables and sea food have been deserted
3. The volume of fish have decreased to deplorable level, about 70% fish have decreased in the sea
4. Decreased market prices of fish catch
5. Agricultural lands and livestock rearing have been perished
6. Increased un-employment
7. Increased distress migration
8. Increased the prices of petroleum, diesel and foodstuff

### **Role of Women in fishing**

#### **Social Status of Women**

Fisherfolk society in Pakistan has remained liberal compared to the agriculture society of the country. Personal property was unheard of and there was no discrimination between man and woman in this society. All property endowed by nature was considered community property. The women distributed what was harvested, and they were the virtual heads of the family.

Unlike other rural societies there was no 'veil system' for women in fisherfolk society. Despite working hard the women had liberties in

the fisherfolk society. The women had greater role in the family matters because the fishermen usually passed their more time while fishing. Therefore, the women had to look after the house and deal with all the problems of the family.

It was due to such status that a number of fisherwomen had developed reputation of being the chiefs of not only the family but also locality or the whole cast. Everyone, including men, was identified by their mothers, not their fathers - a practice that still lingers in fisherfolk society. Similarly, some casts in the fisherfolk are also named after the women.

Even Karachi- the metropolitan coastal city of Pakistan and the provincial headquarter of its Sindh province was also named after a woman – Mai Kalochi, who was the chieftain of the small fishing village of the earlier times. It is said that she herself used to run the fishing business and other trade.

Presently, however, there are two diversified trends in the fisherfolk communities with regard to status of women. In the traditional fisherfolk communities there is still liberal thinking about the women. However, a large number of agriculture communities have also diverted their livelihood towards fisheries after the destruction of agriculture sector in the Indus deltaic coastal area.

These agriculture societies have usually been rigid with regard to women. In these communities women are considered as commodity whose ownership is claimed by male. As such women are not only deprived of their basic rights and freedoms but are also confined inside the four-walls of the house in the name of morality and decency.

With the shift of this population towards fisheries livelihoods their rigid traditions with regard to women have also shifted in the fisherfolk society. The same section of the society is still trying to keep the women in exclusion. There is still veil system for the women of same section of the society in the fisheries livelihoods.

### **Women in Fishing Profession**

In the past the women usually accompanied their men family members on fishing trips. There was no major division of work. The fishermen usually would take whole family to a fishing trip to remote islands, where the whole family was engaged in fishing as

well as cleaning and drying fish. In the case of use of big nets the men and women would jointly throw the net in the water and pulled it out. Back in the village women were engaged in the sell of fish in the local as well as the remote markets while the male would continue fishing.

In some cases if the male left for the major fishing voyages for ten to twenty days, the fisher women would continue fishing though at small scale in the shallow waters of coast. In the coastal region of Sindh province the women used the nets in the creeks of the Sindh coast.

However, with the commercialization of fisheries, expansion of fishing business into an industry, and the overcrowding of the non-indigenous fishermen everywhere from the deltaic creeks to the deep waters of coast the women were slowly and gradually pushed out of the fishing activities. With the change in the fishing practices from the family fishing to industrial fishing the role of women of the fishing community in the family fishing has come to almost an end in Pakistan.

### **Women in Net Making Activity**

The architect of the fishing net is said to have been the woman who in the post-cave period undertook agriculture, animal husbandry, and fishing as her role in society. Fisherwomen were the main artisans of fishing nets and baskets, etc. in the sub-continent as well. The earliest nets were made of straw collected from the jungle.

Later on cotton thread was developed. Different kinds of nets originate from Sindh and Balochistan but it was after 1977 that there was a sudden increase in the variety of nets. When fisher women more or less retired from active fishing and focused more on the home, they continued to make the fishing nets, which brought them a steady income.

The fisher women who wove nets were paid for it even within their own families. The main source of income for fisher women has always been from making cotton-fishing nets. The women earned a stable and regular, if modest, income.

Earnings from net making depended on the complexity, strength, and weight of the net. When nets were made exclusive of cotton thread, fisher women earned Rs. 5 to 10 per day, but the currency then had very high buying power. Income was steady, as work was always available. Buyers of fishing nets awarded work to the women piecemeal. Many standardized sections of nets were then pieced together into a larger net.

However, after late 60s the process of modernization, mechanization, and globalization suddenly hit hard the indigenous cotton net-making profession of the fisherwomen, ousting them from this profession like they were ousted from fishing activity. What happened all of sudden was the import of nylon nets in

Pakistan, which quickly started replacing the traditional cotton nets. As a result, the demand of the cotton nets started dwindling depriving a large number of women cotton net makers from this local skill as well as main earning source.

It is said that nylon material had its origins in the 40s during World War II. After the war was over, all the surplus nylon for parachutes was exported to third World countries by Western European countries. But once silk thread was introduced, the women lost their livelihood. The governments of the time never gave it a through or considered creating alternate means of earning for the affected women.

The first nylon ropes in Pakistan were imported from USA. The local fisherfolk adopted this commodity since they could both use it directly as well as trade in it. Later, silk and nylon thread was also imported from Japan and Korea. Around the same time some factories were setup in Karachi for the manufacture of nylon fishing nets.

Thus the age of the cotton fishing net came to an almost abrupt end. As such by the early 70s, artisan fisher women were thrown out of net making business. Today the situation is such that few of the present generation of fisher folk have any memories of their womenfolk as skilled, paid craftswomen fashioning fine fishing nets. The effects of the nylon net on the fishing community are multidimensional. Fisher women were in particular adversely affected as their income-earning activity came to a standstill.

### **Women in Fish Cleaning**

Thrown out of fishing as well as net making livelihoods the fisher women found some space in the mending of nets and the cleaning of fish. Women were employed in fish related activities, such as fish drying and cleaning.

In fact fish is bought from the fishermen by middlemen, and sold to processing factories. In these factories it is converted to fishmeal or powder and sold to poultry farms. The seasonal export of crabs is another activity that employed women labor.

Crabs are caught from the root system of the mangroves and are kept in baskets covered with mangrove leaves, till they are processed. This involves boiling them, and extracting the meat and freezing it in plastic bags in ice buckets. Women extract the meat while the men fill the bags for freezing. The frozen product is exported.

Deprived of fishing and net making economic activities, the local fisher women found some jobs in fish processing factories and fish cleaning sheds. However, about a decade ago illegal immigrant from Bangladesh and Burma started taking over this occupation since in their desperation they work for half-wags and are not subject to unions or the terms of formal employment.

With the passage of time illegal women immigrants from Bengal and Burma have replaced the local Fisherfolk women. According to the local community members a large number of the illegal immigrants have settled the coastal areas of Karachi and set up their settlements along with their women family members. The Women illegal immigrants have affected the earning local Fisherfolk of women engaged in fishing related activities.

### **Fisherfolk Women's Vulnerability & Role of Government**

With the reduced role in economic activities related to fisheries, the status and clout of Fisherfolk women have also been decreased. In fact fisherwomen have been impoverished by unbridled commercialism and partial economic and business policies. With the expansion of fishing business into an industry, women no longer manage the business as they did in the past.



A very small number of local fisherwomen are involved in peeling shrimps, weaving nets, making fish baskets, etc. as laborers. Due to above-mentioned hostile developments on the Pakistan coast, the economic conditions of the fisher women have deteriorated and poverty and lack of empowerment among women has become endemic.

The role and policies of the government of Pakistan with regard to Fisherfolk women, their social status as well as livelihood resources are negligible. The governments in Pakistan have so far remained almost un-concerned about the socio-economic issues of Fisherfolk women. So far, not a single policy framework or administrative action with regard to the socio-economic uplift of fisherwomen and sustainability of their livelihoods has been taken by the government.

Lack of acknowledgement of the role of the women in the fisheries sector on the part of Pakistan government can be judged from the fact that not a single word can be seen about the Fisherfolk women in the government policy documents, laws and rules etc.

Handbook of Fisheries Statistics of Pakistan – the annual publication of Pakistan's Marine Fisheries Department last published in 1993, has no mention of the women, despite carrying a complete chapter on fishermen population. Similarly, the deep-sea fishing policy of 1995 as well as the current amended policy, carries not a single word about women.

### **Impact of Globalization on Fishery Sector in Pakistan**

In fact globalization is a powerful driving force behind today's unprecedented biological impulsion. An upsurge of trade and investment in natural resources sectors such as forestry, mining, and petroleum development is threatening the health of the world's forests, mountains, waters, and other sensitive ecosystems.

However, the main threat of the globalization is being faced by fisheries resources of the world, as according to report, the global fisheries resources are collapsing as fish exports have increased. The survival of several million traditional fisherfolk has been severely threatened by allowing joint ventures with foreign companies for deep- sea fishing.

These export-oriented enterprises enjoy tax holidays for many years and earn vast sums from marine exports. This opening up of the sector has not only lead to the indiscriminate destruction of marine resources and eroded the small decentralized fishing sector, but has also substantially reduced the availability of fish for domestic consumption. Globalization is thus wiping out traditional, sustainable, efficient systems and is replacing them with inefficient, unhealthy, energy and capital intensive, unsustainable, industrialized food systems.

### **Fish Export**

During the year 2000 –2002, the total fish production in Pakistan was recorded as 665,000 metric tons. Out of which the share of marine fisheries was 480,000 metric tons, while the contribution of inland fisheries was only 185,000 metric tons. The main fish species being caught by the artisanal and industrial fisheries especially from the coastal zones of Pakistan include various kinds of fish, shellfish including shrimps, lobsters, crabs, and mollusks etc.

Fish has emerged as one of the major sources of export earning for Pakistan. About 30 – 35% of the fish and fishery products are exported to European Union countries. Japan, U. S. A., China, Saudi Arabia, U. A. E. Malaysia, S. Korea, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, and Singapore are other major importing countries.

### **Rangers, contact in Badin Zero point**

Pakistan para military Rangers, deployed at Zero Point in Badin coast have created major threat to the traditional fishermen who have been engaged in their livelihood activities. Rangers occupied the seashore and auction the waters to non-fishermen to make lucrative business. In this situation traditional fishermen are made bound to give their entire catch to contractors on their-own fixed price.

In case of resistance, the fishermen have to face torture during their activity. Legally, the Rangers have to look after at the border, they shouldn't have any right of fishing or auction of waters. But, they are doing such activity which some time creates law and order situation.

Despite the hue and cry by the people the government could not take any favorable steps to provide safety of life and livelihood of

traditional fishermen. The management of the fisheries sector by the government is marred with problems. These problems can be categorized as under:

- No Integrated Coastal / Fisheries Management System
- Lack of Proper Implementation on the Laws and Rules
- Poor Coordination Between Various Departments

### **Recommendations**

- To introduce sustainable fishing policy as soon as possible to protect livelihood of the fishermen
- Right of fishing from sea, rivers, lakes and other waters should be legalized for the traditional fishermen who have been engaged in fishing through their forefathers
- To stop issuing licenses to Deep sea trawlers
- To ban use of destructive nets
- Contract system should be replaced by license system at lakes, rivers and canals and exploitation of the local fishermen should be stopped
- Fishermen should have rights to find livelihood from the water resources
- Those multi national companies involved in polluting and destroying marine ecology should be taken to task
- To provide protection to the fishermen from Government security agencies which are deployed near the coast

## **Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum**

Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum is the representative organization of the fishing communities living by the coasts of Pakistan particularly Sindh coast. Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum is a Non Governmental Organization of the fisher women and men (sea and inland) residing in the different parts of the country. Majority of the fisher people live in Sindh and Baluchistan provinces. The PFF was formed on May 5, 1998.

### **Vision**

PFF, jointly with the deprived, disregarded and disfavored sections of the society, intends to bring such changes in the attitudes and policies of the government and its institutions which should create an atmosphere in which the fisher folk communities individually as well as collectively take the responsibilities of sustainable use of the coastal and inland water resources.

### **Mission**

Protecting the livelihood, to bring sustainability in the fisheries resources as well as positive changes in the socio-economic conditions of the local communities, through awareness and mobilization. PFF wish to establish a conducive environment, which provides equal share and ownership on water bodies and marine resources to the local fisherfolk. They are given equal responsibility for protection and management of the conservation of nature.

### **Objectives**

1. To initiate advocacy for the livelihood resources of the community.
2. To mobilize the fishing community for their rights
3. To struggle against the elements and factors responsible for the depletion in the coastal as well as inland fisheries resources by adopting a practical strategy for the protection of fisheries resources.
4. To launch campaign against over- fishing, harmful methods of fishing, the use of destructive nets.

5. To launch an advocacy and struggle for imposing complete ban on the deep-sea factory trawlers and industrial fishing boats.
6. To work for the socio-economic uplift of the Fisherfolk communities including improvement of education, health, income generation, fisheries marketing, credit systems, replacement of contract system of fishing with the license system and to create alternative livelihoods resources/opportunities for the fisher folk communities in the face of decline in the fisheries resources.

### **PFF Units**

47 'units', representing to different waters, have been established in a number of fisherfolk villages of coastal and inland areas. The PFF has 12,000 members including 25% of women.

### **Activities**

PFF since its inception has been raising the issues of fisherfolk communities of Pakistan at the regional, national, as well as international level. The organization has been doing advocacy and lobbying against existing threats to the livelihoods of the communities, through seminars, workshops, rallies as well as using media tools to highlight the issues on proper lawmaking forums.

### **Detained Fishermen**

The PFF works for the freedom of the Pakistani as well as Indian fishermen imprisoned in jails of both the countries on the allegations of violating coastal borders and influences the government authorities of Pakistan and India to resolve the issue of frequently arresting the fishermen of each other, through amicable dialogue, proper and scientific border demarcations.

### **Newsletter**

Regular publication of monthly "Fisherfolk", an information sheet in Urdu, Sindhi and English is a major source of the PFF to highlight the issues, cultural activities, focus major problems being faced by localities, including shortage of water, inadequate sanitation system, problems in schools and health centers in the fishing villages.

### **World Fisheries Day**

The PFF observes the World Fisheries Day on November 21<sup>st</sup> every year with full enthusiasm in which hundreds of fishermen, women and children participate and take active part in the celebrations. It is just to give at least one-day rest to the fish stocks in the sea by banning fishing by big trawlers on the day.

### **Theater**

Theater is a major source to convey the people about their issues and problems and invite them to come forward for removing their grievances. Theater is helpful to raise issues through performance and the direct participation of the public.

### **Disaster Management**

Since the natural disasters have become routine in the coastal areas Thatta, Badin and Karachi due to manmade projects that is why the life and livelihood of the communities is always at stake. The PFF, since its inception has been raising voice against the unplanned mega water projects and its visible affects that have played havoc with the communities.

In fact the government could not take effective steps regarding the disaster management to save the life of the people. But, the PFF being an organization that represents three million people of the fishing community always remains in the field to face the situation.

In this regard either it is Cyclone, earthquakes, devastating rains, flood-like situation in Badin and Thatta coasts or it is Oil Disaster at Karachi, PFF remains at forefront to support the victims in emergency as well as for the rehabilitation of the communities.

PFF with the partnership of Oxfam, Action aid Pakistan, PILER and Caritas has still been working in Thatta, Badin and Karachi. The PFF believes that through its commitment and dedication it has developed confidence in the community.

### **Partnership**

PFF has developed linkages with other organizations and networks in Pakistan as well as abroad, which provide moral support in its struggle for sustainable livelihoods, and are also supporting the community initiatives.



### **International Friends**

1. World Forum of Fisher People
2. Asian Cultural Forum on Development
3. Green Peace
4. International Collective Support of Fish Workers (ICSF)
5. FDH
6. South Asia Labor Forum

### **National Friends**

1. Piler
2. Action Aid Pakistan
3. Oxfam GB
4. PNRDP
5. Sungi
6. IUCN
7. Shirkatgah
8. WWF
9. HANDS
10. SDPI
11. Peoples Rights Movement (PRM)
12. Caritas Pakistan

**Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum**  
**Sachal Hall Jamat Ibrahim Haideri**  
**Market bin Qasim Township Karachi**  
**Phone/fax: 092 - 021 5090543/5092862**  
**E-mail: [pakistanfisherfolk@hotmail.com](mailto:pakistanfisherfolk@hotmail.com)**  
**[fisherfplk@cyber.net.pk](mailto:fisherfplk@cyber.net.pk)**

