A Brief Review of Effect of Covid -19 on Fisheries

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The covid-19 pandemic, unprecedented in modern times, has caused major disruption around the world by directly or indirectly affecting both micro and macro ecosystems which is ultimately reflected in the downfall of the global economy. Administrations have taken several measures so as to control the spread of this deadly virus which includes social isolation directives through lockdown, limiting the transport service for essential services, restriction of business opening hours etc. On one hand we can say that due to such restrictions only our country with a very high population is able to restrict the spread of Covid-19, but at the same time it is important to analyse the side effect of total shutdown on the fishery industry which includes seafood fishery sector, fresh water fishery sector and brackish water fishery sector along with the majority of fishery dependant allied industries, who have to deal with a bleak demand outlook and face an array of supply challenges. According to the Director of Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) Dr. C. N. Ravishankar in the year 2017-18 the fisheries sector in India contributed to about Rs. 1.75 lakh crore to Gross Value added Marine products thus, it is the most important agricultural commodity exported, accounting for close to $6.7 billion of exports.

Gujarat which topped the list in marine seafood production in 2018 with 7.8 lakh tonnes is severely impacted in this pandemic. China being major export market for Gujarat the trade between the two was affected since January itself.

Due to an effective shutdown industrial fish-food service demand has evaporated due to closure of restaurants and lack of transportation facilities resulted in a lull for not only domestic buyers and but also the processing industry. As this pandemic has hit more than 170 countries till now and many of them have cancelled orders thus resulting in uncertainty of the export market. Traders have anticipated a drop in price by 20-40 per cent.
As fish is a perishable item, there is high demand for packaged and frozen products due to panic buyers but the processing and canning industry will not be able to cater to this demand due to non-availability of manpower. The high-end fresh products which are transported by air are also directly affected due to cancellation of flights, thus directly affecting the trade. Overall, a sharp decline in demand resulted in price drop of many species, particularly those which were served as delicacy in restaurants.

According to The Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT), it is estimated that in Kerala alone there will be an income loss of approximately Rs. 130 crore to fishermen (The Hindu business news). According to CIFT experts, due to closure of landing centres many fishermen are stranded in sea on-board trawlers. It is estimated that there are about 22,000 crafts that ply on Kerala coast with a fish production of about 6.4 lakh tonnes, which was at a standstill.

A report prepared by the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) said that in India the marine fishery sector in deep sea, is inflicting a daily loss of Rs 224 crore. The monthly loss calculated by this Kochi-based institute is estimated to be about Rs.6,838 crore, However, they have not taken the loss incurred in fish processing, exports etc into account.

One of the repercussions of this pandemic outbreak is suspension or cancellation of seafood trade fare events, which are organised throughout the world for promotion and propagation of fishery products.

Though, it is noted that financial aid from the government is requested by several representatives from fishery industry in many countries, but Indian government has already announced many relief packages for the fishery industry along with giving relaxation to the industry in the lock down period. The finance department of government of India announced following relief for Department of Fisheries:

1. Extension of all Sanitary Permits (SIPs) for import of SPF Shrimp Broodstock and other Agriculture inputs expiring between 01.03.2020 to 15.04.2020 by 3 months.
2. Delay upto 1 month in arrival of consignments to be condoned.
3. No additional booking charges for rebooking of quarantine cubicles for cancelled consignments in Aquatic Quarantine Facility (AQF) Chennai.
4. The verification of documents and grant of NOC for Quarantine would be relaxed from 7 days to 3 days.

Apart from that as fishing activities are now allowed in the lockdown period, The Central Inland Fishery Research Institute (CIFRI) has also issued an advisory for fishermen regarding control of spread of covid-19 while performing various duties related to fisheries. It includes maintaining social distance, wearing masks, washing hands regularly etc.

In spite of several measures proposed by Food And Agriculture Organization (FAO) to support the supply chain it is very difficult to calculate the time period which would be required to revive the fishery industry not only in India but also worldwide as the duration and severity of the pandemic is unknown.

Referencing :-

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