

ICSF Occasional Paper

**A Study of Migrant Fishers  
from Andhra Pradesh  
in the Gujarat Marine Fishing Industry**

**Manas Roshan**



**International Collective in Support of Fishworkers**  
[www.icsf.net](http://www.icsf.net)



**ICSF Occasional Paper**

**A Study of Migrant Fishers  
from Andhra Pradesh  
in the Gujarat Marine Fishing Industry**

**Manas Roshan**



---

**International Collective in Support of Fishworkers**  
[www.icsf.net](http://www.icsf.net)

**ICSF Occasional Paper**

**A Study of Migrant Fishers from Andhra Pradesh  
in the Gujarat Marine Fishing Industry**

**Author**

Manas Roshan

Email: manas.roshan@gmail.com

**December 2016**

**Edited by**

Santanu Chacraverti and Ishita Basu

**Layout by**

P Sivasakthivel (ICSF)

**Front Cover photo by**

Nikhil Roshan: Workers pack fish into crates to be unloaded from the fishing craft as it returns to the Veraval harbour, Gujarat.

**Front cover inside and Back cover inside photo by**

Nikhil Roshan: Crew and fishing craft sizes for single-day fishing are smaller and mostly carried out by Gujarati fishers.

**Published by**

International Collective in Support of Fishworkers

27 College Road, Chennai 600 006, India

Tel: +91 44 2827 5303 Fax: +91 44 2825 4457

Email: icsf@icsf.net

www.icsf.net

Copyright © ICSF 2016

**ISBN 978 93 80802 67 1**

While ICSF reserves all rights for this publication, any portion of it may be freely copied and distributed, provided appropriate credit is given. Any commercial use of this material is prohibited without prior permission. ICSF would appreciate receiving a copy of any publication that uses this publication as a source.

The opinions and positions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of ICSF or of the supporting agencies.

## Contents

A STUDY OF MIGRANT FISHERS FROM ANDHRA PRADESH IN THE GUJARAT MARINE FISHING INDUSTRY .....	1
Introduction.....	1
Rationale.....	2
Objectives .....	3
Methodology.....	3
Profile of Respondents.....	5
GUJARAT FISHERIES .....	7
Veraval .....	7
Fishing in Andhra Pradesh .....	8
Conditions of Work and Recruitment .....	9
The Boats.....	11
The Expedition .....	12
Life on a Boat.....	13
Grievances of the Srikakulam Fishermen .....	14
Fishers Rights and the Legal Framework on Migration .....	17
Explaining Migration .....	21
Fisheries Department, Veraval .....	22
FISH PROCESSING UNITS .....	24
Impact of Migration on Family and Village .....	25
Child Labour in Fishing.....	26
Indian Fishermen in Pakistani Jails .....	27
Migration Statistics .....	27
RECOMMENDATIONS .....	28
Recommendations.....	28
REFERENCES.....	30
INTERVIEWS .....	32
ANNEXURE I: Srikakulam Workshop.....	33
ANNEXURE II: Workshop Agenda.....	41



[Map Source: Maps of India (edited and locations added)]

---

## A STUDY OF MIGRANT FISHERS FROM ANDHRA PRADESH IN THE GUJARAT MARINE FISHING INDUSTRY

### Introduction

Since the 1980s, accelerated growth rates in Gujarat and the entrepreneurial zeal of its people went hand-in-hand as the state grew into a major industrial hub. Among India's leading labour recipients, the state saw the number of migrants go up by 61 per cent between 1991 and 2001 (Census, 2001). These were absorbed into its chemical industries and textile plants, particularly in industrial clusters and cities like Surat, famous for its diamond trade and textile units.

Gujarat also has the country's longest coastline of about 1,600 km and is a major maritime state with a long history of trade in the Arabian Sea. Though fish consumption in the state is very low, its marine fish production grew to over 6 lakh tonnes (0.6 mn tonnes) by 2000, over eight times what it was in 1960, when the state was formed. Today, that figure has risen to 8 lakh tonnes (0.8 mn tonnes), the export units alone processing about 2.5 lakh tonnes (0.25 mn tonnes) every year (Gujarat Fisheries, 2013).

Fishing activity in the state continues to be practised by the kharwa and koli communities, as it was traditionally, but the development of Gujarat's fisheries since the 1980s has seen a thrust towards mechanized methods and trawl boats.<sup>1</sup> Due to a scarcity of labour, migrants from other states have been working in various roles in the industry, particularly as fishers on the multi-day fishing trawlers. Since the 1990s, the work on boats has come to be dominated by migrants from Andhra Pradesh, mostly from fishing villages in Srikakulam

---

1 Even in 1998, though only 27 per cent of the fishing fleet comprised trawlers, trawls accounted for 69 per cent of total marine fish production in the state (Mathew S, 2000).

and Vizianagaram districts. Estimates of the number of migrants from Andhra Pradesh in Veraval put the number as high as 25,000 every season.

Though there are nearly 250 fishing villages<sup>2</sup> (CMFRI, 2010) on the Gujarat coastline, the three major fishing harbours are Veraval, Porbandar and Mangrol. Veraval in the Gir Somnath district alone accounted for 2.84 lakh tonnes (0.28 mn tonnes) which is 35 per cent of marine fish catch in 2014–15.<sup>3</sup>

Though fish export contributes to huge foreign exchange earnings<sup>4</sup> and is one of the largest employers, the plight of migrant fishermen isn't a part of the welfare discourse on the industry and is rarely discussed while framing policy. This study aims to document the living and working conditions of migrants from Srikakulam district in the Veraval fishing industry to understand their fishing practices, the specific circumstances motivating them to travel and their status vis-à-vis the industry and the government.

## **Rationale**

Each year, thousands of men and women migrate from their homes, some alone, some with their families, in search of work. This exodus, unlike more stable, permanent resettlement, is seasonal, fraught with more hardship and most often driven by deprivation. At 309 million, internal migrants constituted 30 per cent of the country's population in 2001. Other estimates were even higher: 326 million according to the National Sample Survey 2007–08. The most recent census projected that the number was as high as 400 million.<sup>5</sup>

While most migrant labour is in the form of unskilled wage work in agriculture and construction, the case of the Andhra Pradesh fishers is unique because they are skilled and highly sought after deep-sea fishermen.

India lacks one composite law regulating labour in fisheries. The weak implementation of labour laws and interstate migration rules combined with migrant fishers being left out of unions or associations in labour-receiving states make them doubly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. At the same time, a study of the push-and-pull factors driving migration and a comparison of the modes of fisheries management could have important lessons for the labour-sending states.

---

2 Marine Fisheries Census 2010.

3 Jagdish Tandel, Director, Veraval Fisheries Department, Interviewed in May 2016.

4 Marine products accounted for \$5.5 million in 2014–15, the largest chunk (14 per cent) of the total agricultural exports (Indian Express, 2016).

5 Provisional 2011 Census estimate, quoted in UNESCO, 2013.



The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) has been engaging with issues of concern to fishers and fishworkers since its inception in 1986. Among other issues, it studies migration, both international and internal, in the fisheries and the particular vulnerabilities facing migrant fishers with a view to improving the conditions on board vessels through legal and policy interventions. ICSF also engaged with the process leading to the adoption of the Work in Fishing Convention at the 96th International Labour Conference of the International Labour Organization in 2007, of which India is a signatory. In June 2014, India, along with other member states of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), adopted the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, whose charter encompasses employment conditions and social development of fishers, including that of migrants. ICSF believes that improving working and living conditions on fishing vessels can positively influence fisheries management.

## **Objectives**

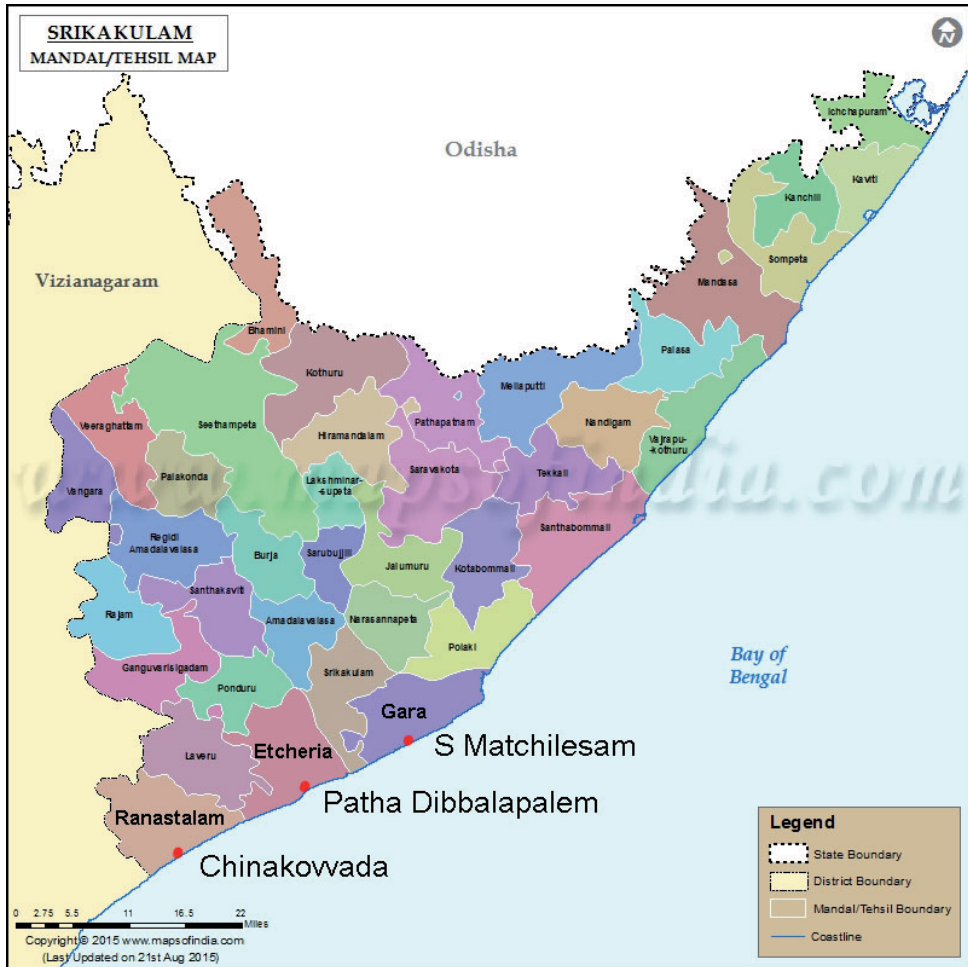
In the context of migrant fishers from Andhra Pradesh in Gujarat, the objectives of the study are:

1. To understand the economic and social factors behind the recruitment of interstate migrants into different types of marine fishing operations in Gujarat;
2. To get a social picture of the Gujarat fishing industry in the context of interstate migration and understand the benefits and costs arising from such movements of people;
3. To study the nature and type of government interventions into labour migration and welfare, in both Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh, and the efforts to implement these measures; and
4. To understand the economic and social impacts of migration on the families of migrants.

## **Methodology**

The study relies primarily on unstructured interviews with migrant fishers, individually and in groups, in Veraval and with returnees and non-migrating fishers in selected villages in Srikakulam district. Based on the rapport established with individual fishers and the suggestions of fisheries officials and local associations, three villages were chosen: Srikurmam Machilesam in Garamandal, Patha Dibbalapalem in Etcherla, and Chinakovvada in

Ranasthalam. The first and the last are large villages but almost 90 per cent men from the former migrate to Gujarat while the latter sees very little migration. Patha Dibbalapalem is a small hamlet of less than a hundred people, where too only a small number migrate for work.



[Map Source: Maps of India (edited and locations added)]

<b>Village</b>	<b>Population</b>
Chinakovvada	1843
Srikurmam Machilesam	1626
Patha Dibbalapalem	61

[Source: Marine Fisheries Census, CMFRI, 2010]

Forty fishers were interviewed for this study. In Srikurmam Machilesam, all twenty interviewees (in two groups and with five fishers individually) migrate seasonally to Gujarat. In Patha Dibbalapalem, two out of the ten interviewees (conducted in two groups: migrants and non-migrants) were migrating fishers. In Chinakovvada, all ten fishers interviewed were non-migrants.

Interviews were also conducted with boat owners, local fishermen and workers in Veraval, fisheries and other government officials in both states, as well as representative voices from the Veraval fish processing industry. The study also refers to secondary sources for data and other information on fisheries and socio-economic indicators of the two states.

### **Profile of Respondents**

All fishers interviewed for this study are from Srikakulam district. Andhra Pradesh has about thirteen fishing castes, of which the major ones are Vadabalaji, Jalari, Palle, Neyyala and Pattapu. The fishing castes in the state are included in the Backward Classes category. (This is the case in Gujarat, too. In Tamil Nadu, fishermen fall in the Most Backward Caste grouping.) Vadabalaji is the largest grouping, accounting for over 60 per cent of the fisher population, especially in the northern districts like Srikakulam.<sup>6</sup> Despite being away for eight months of the year, the migrants maintain strong religious and social ties with their home villages and communities.

Poverty remains a major factor driving migration. All interviewees are economic migrants, travelling to earn better livelihoods. Of the 1.6 lakh fisher families in the state, 97 per cent are below the official poverty line.

Most fishers were in the age group of thirty-five to forty-five years, with a few below thirty years and two over fifty. Educational attainment among the sampled fishers ranged from primary school in most cases to matriculation

<sup>6</sup> The population estimate was obtained from state officials and fisheries representatives. The number is uncontested, though exact data is unobtainable.

among a few. Many among the younger generation, especially children of migrating fishers, are now graduates. Many have moved to more lucrative jobs on merchant vessels or aspire to work in private companies.

Only a small number of Srikakulam fishers own any land (Marine Fisheries Census, CMFRI, 2010). Fishers migrating to Gujarat have now begun to acquire land and those who lived in kutchha (mud and thatch) huts even a generation ago have now constructed pucca (brick and cement) houses.

MANAS ROSHAN



Gurumurthy, an experienced skipper in Veraval, and his 19-year-old son, Prasad, at home in Patha Dibbalapalem village in Srikakulam. Prasad, studying to finish a BSc in Chemistry, has never been on fishing. He wants a private job in the city.

## GUJARAT FISHERIES

**T**he Seafood Exporters Association of India estimates that the Gujarat fisheries employs about five lakh workers (0.5 mn), including fishers, labour for transport, sorting and processing units, and allied industries like ice factories.<sup>7</sup>

During the year 2013–14, total fish production in Gujarat was estimated at 7.98 lakh tonnes (0.79 mn tonnes), worth Rs 5,402 crore (54.2 bn), the highest in the country. Unlike many other states where inland fishing is more productive, marine fish production constitutes about 87 per cent of Gujarat's total fish production. In the same year, export of 2.5 lakh tonnes (0.25 mn tonnes) of fish and fish products obtained a foreign exchange earnings of Rs 3,658 crore (36.5 bn) (Gujarat Fisheries, 2013).

The major species (as per fish landing tonnage) in fish landings are non-penaeid prawns, Bombay Duck, ribbon fish, croakers, catfish, squid and cuttle fish. Other species include penaeid prawns, pomfret, shark, cod, etc. (CMFRI, 2013).

The fishing season is officially from 15 August to 10 June. A ban on fishing activities in the area of the Exclusive Economic Zone (beyond 12 nautical miles) is imposed in the intervening period. However, a decrease in the fish catch this year induced the Gujarat fishers to voluntarily cease fishing by the first week of May.

At the end of 2014, 37,128 fishing boats were registered in the state, of which 24,923 were mechanized boats (almost 70 per cent) and 12,205 were non-mechanized boats (Gujarat Fisheries, 2013).

### Veraval

Gir Somnath district, carved out of Junagadh district in 2013, has twelve fish landing centres. The undivided state of Junagadh used to have sixteen centres. Of the five active fishing harbours in Gujarat, the major harbour of Veraval, the biggest fish landing centre in Gujarat and one of the biggest in India, is in Gir Somnath district. Veraval produced 2.88 lakh tonnes (0.28 mn tonnes) of marine fish in 2014-15. Of this, 24,073 tonnes (0.024 mn tonnes) was exported, fetching Rs 361 crore (0.36 bn) in export earnings. At the end of the 2015 season, the fish production seems to have decreased to 2.08 lakh tonnes (0.20 mn tonnes).<sup>8</sup> Veraval is also home to seventy of Gujarat's eighty-three fish

7 Kenny Thomas, Vice President, Seafood Exporters Association of India, interviewed in March 2016.

8 Jagdish Tandel, Director, Veraval Fisheries Department.

processing units approved by the European Union.<sup>9</sup> The scale of trawling operations and the requisite labour force give an idea of how crucial the fishers from Andhra Pradesh are to the industry.

On the face of it, the process for boat registration seems fairly thorough. The department issues an application form, which must be filled up by the boat owner and submitted along with proof of identification, residence, the bill for boat purchase and a boat verification report by a department official. According to the Veraval Fisheries Department, the population of fishers in Veraval was 30,170 at the end of 2015. There were 8,299 fishing boats registered with the department: 8,163 mechanized boats (98 per cent) and the rest were smaller motorized and non-motorized vessels. Boat owners in Veraval number about 1,500.<sup>10</sup> The department claims that it regulates the number of boat licenses so as to avoid overcrowding. But passing through Veraval, it is obvious that the harbour is teeming with many more boats than the department numbers show and business has not slowed down for the town's boat building yards. Locals in the industry claimed the number is much higher.

### **Fishing in Andhra Pradesh**

Andhra Pradesh, also a major fish producing state like Gujarat, has seen an opposite thrust towards inland fishing in the last two decades. While the state's marine fish production in 2014–15 was only a little over half of Gujarat's—4.75 lakh tonnes (0.47 mn tonnes), inland fish production in the same year was 12.76 lakh tonnes (1.27 mn tonnes) (an eleven-fold jump from twenty years ago).<sup>11</sup> District-wise differences in fish production also point to a more lucrative river fishing industry, washed as the state is by the mighty Godavari and Krishna rivers. In West Godavari and Krishna districts, which lead in fish production, freshwater fish account for 90 per cent of fish catch, though both are also coastal districts.<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, the budget allocation to marine fisheries is very small. In its 2015 budget demand, the fisheries department earmarked only 14 per cent of resources under plan schemes to marine fisheries. Funds for capital works like the building of harbours and landing centres are also low.<sup>13</sup> Andhra Pradesh

---

9 Seafood Exporters Association of India.

10 Tulsi K. Gohel, President, Kharwa Samyukta Machhimar Boat Association Veraval, Interviewed in May 2016

11 Andhra Pradesh Fisheries Statistics.

12 AP Fisheries Statistics.

13 AP Fisheries Budget 2015-16.

has 504 fishermen villages but only one major fishing harbour at Visakhapatnam and four mini fishing harbours. Harbours would have had more room to accommodate larger fishing vessels and fish catch volumes.

### Conditions of Work and Recruitment

Srikakulam fishers have been working on Veraval fishing boats for over twenty-five years. They spend eight months of the year in Veraval, leaving in the first week of August, just before the start of the season. Recruitment is done through informal contracts determined by village ties and personal relationships. The chain of command goes from boat owner or *seth* in Gujarat to the *tindal* or boat skipper, a fisherman generally with at least five to ten years of experience, down to the *khalasi* or crew member. Some men I interviewed had worked in Veraval for as long as two decades. Each trawl boat in Gujarat employs eight to nine men, including the skipper.

The *tindal* is entrusted with the responsibility of recruiting the *khalasis*. Unlike most other coastal fisheries, the crew members in Gujarat are paid in advance for the year's work. The *seths* hand over a lump sum amount of Rs 6-7 lakhs (0.6-0.7 mn) to the *tindal* when he goes home at the end of the season, which is meant to cover his and his *khalasis'* salaries for the entire season.

NIKHIL ROSHAN



Fishing craft return to the Veraval harbour at dusk. There were 8,299 fishing craft registered with the Fisheries Department in Veraval.

The *tindal* makes about Rs 20-25,000 (0.02-0.025 mn) every month while the *khalasis* get Rs 7-8,000 (0.07-0.08 mn). Starting salaries (odd jobs on the deck, cooking, etc.) are set at Rs 5,000 (0.05 mn). At the end of the season, the skippers and crewmen also get a small commission on any extra earnings. Some *seths*, they said, paid them a bonus. The skippers could get up to Rs 60,000 (0.06 mn), and the *khalasis* Rs 4,000 (0.04 mn), but very few were so generous.

There are no formal contracts signed between any of the parties. Fishing targets are set by a verbal agreement between the *seth* and *tindal*. The trust involved in such a transaction, on two levels—owner–skipper and skipper–crewman—is considerable; thus the emphasis on experience and personal ties. But, family or village ties between *tindal* and *khalasi* isn't a norm. A few captains said they preferred hiring men from other villages, deeming it more professional: no favours or messy familial spats.

Most fishers I interviewed said that they preferred the salary system, as opposed to a commission determined by the quantity of fish catch per season. The latter system, which is prevalent in other states, made their financial situation very precarious and they were often swindled by owners who distorted the stocks and prices of fish, they claimed.

Others said that the salaries hadn't kept pace with increasing market value of fish and earnings of *seths*. Some, though fewer in number, said that they felt coerced to remain on boats when the working conditions were harsh, a system akin to bonded labour. *Seths* were sometimes too demanding and abusive when the targets weren't met. 'It is difficult work, luckpot-jackpot,' said one fisher. 'If you manage to get a good catch, you're a good worker, but if you come back empty handed, you're useless.'

Every boat and crew member must be registered with the fisheries and customs departments respectively. For the latter, two registration forms, one each for the boat owner and the crew member, have to be filled and submitted with IDs, boat registration numbers (with the fisheries department), *tindals'* IDs and address details of applicants. Since August 2015, a police verification of the applicant in his home state is a must.

These ID cards issued by the custom house are only valid in Veraval, and for a period of three years. Since 2015, validity has been reduced to one year because the fisheries department has taken over responsibility of issuing IDs from 2016. A move to biometric cards, which fishers can use as identification in any part of the country, would make the entire process unnecessary. But most of the respondents in Srikakulam haven't yet been issued these cards though many have had their biometric data recorded.



## The Boats

In Veraval, as on the rest of the Gujarat coast, mechanized boats dominate fishing operations while motorized and traditional boats are in smaller numbers. The *khalasis* on the smaller trawlers, which go on shorter trips of 10-14 hours—are primarily from south Gujarat—Valsad, Navsari, etc. Some local fishers also go on longer trips—of up to fifteen days. The migrants from Andhra Pradesh make up over 60 per cent of the crew on the multi-day trawling trips.

Traditional multi-day fishing trawlers, built in the workshops in the region, are around 20 metres long and powered by engines of 75–100 horse power. Each is fitted with a radio transmitter and navigational instruments like GPS and echo-location fishfinders. The state government subsidises the diesel, nets and navigational instruments for the boat owners.

Cabins are constructed at the back of the deck. These cabins, just about 8 x 6 ft big, house eight men at a time, along with the navigation equipment and the fishers' luggage, safety kits, tiny shrines for their idols, and even small TVs and DVD players.

MANAS ROSHAN



Migrant and local fishers always work separately to avoid fights.

The engine room is under the deck, as is the fish store: insulated rooms with a capacity of up to 10 tonnes (0.001 mn). Average fish catch per boat each season is worth about Rs 35 lakhs (3.5 mn), going up to Rs 50 lakhs (5 mn). The fishers said that boat owners set them a target of at least four tonnes at the end of every trip. With diesel (4,000 litres), ice (120–130 blocks each weighing 50 kg) and ration for the fishers—paid for by the owners—every trip costs the *seth* about Rs 4 lakhs (0.4 mn).

Movement Registers, maintained by the fisheries department (an official posted at each harbour), log every boat going out to sea (along with crew members' names and ID numbers, duration of their trips, etc.). A boat's return to the jetty is similarly noted in the register. The Coast Guard routinely inspects boats and crew status out at sea. Fishers reported that their boats were regularly checked and sometimes impounded when crew members didn't have the requisite ID.

## **The Expedition**

Every fishing trip for the migrant fishers lasts between fifteen and twenty-five days. The boats set out from Veraval harbour and make their way down the west coast, along Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka down to Kerala. The boats generally fish in groups, for safety and also to corner large schools of fish. Communication with fishers in other states is crucial, directing them towards more fertile waters.

During this time they almost never touch the shore, except in case of emergencies or to replenish supplies. Some fishers said they had experienced harassment at the hands of local fishers in other states who opposed any outsiders fishing in their waters. Some had been beaten; others had to pay large sums of money to dock. Government-regulated harbours were safe to dock in, they said, but officials often charged arbitrary amounts as bribes.

Work is divided among the crew members. While the *tindal* primarily steers and operates the radio and navigation equipment, the second skipper, another experienced hand, is in charge of the fish store, in which each species is packed separately. He also steers the boat at night, while the *tindal* rests. The others switch between tasks: lowering nets, manning the winch, mending nets, sorting the fish catch. The men fish through the day and for most of the night, especially when the catch is meagre. Each of these tasks is shared by the crew. Nets stay in the water for up to three hours at a time, during which the fishers rest and sleep. The deck springs back to life when it's time to raise the nets and haul them onboard before the catch is unloaded. The fish are then sorted, which takes up to two hours depending on the size of the catch, and packed into

the store. A typical day consists of six such cycles, continuing late into the night in lean periods. Regular hours are impossible in the trade, the fishers said, especially given the targets set by *seths*. The respondents said they managed up to five hours of sleep at night but such rest had lately become a luxury with *seths* setting unfeasible targets.

### **Life on a Boat**

By any standards, the life of the fishers in the study is extremely challenging. The eight months they're employed is almost entirely spent on the boats. At the end of each fishing trip (sometimes as long as twenty-five days), when they return to Veraval, the men get twenty-four hours on shore to clean up, refuel and replenish ration and supplies, before they set off again. They spend even that night in the boat, as they have no other accommodation. The men share these tasks and also run any personal errands on shore.

Working conditions on the boats are similar for local fishers. But their salaries are often higher. The migrants claimed they are sometimes paid double but this isn't the case with the fishers interviewed for this study. But the crew is almost always homogenous, with migrants and locals never working together

NIKHIL ROSHAN



A young migrant fisher at the Veraval harbour. After 20 and 25 consecutive days at sea, the men touch shore for just one day before they set off again on the next fishing trip.

on one boat. Both groups acknowledge that this is because fights often break out between them. The barrier of language also forces crews to be separate. The arrangement has clearly left several migrants insulated from any cross-cultural exchange. Very few *khalasis* speak any language other than Telugu. The *tindals*, on the other hand, communicate with *seths* and other locals and speak either Hindi or Gujarati.

While at sea, the men live on carefully rationed food and water supplies. For entertainment, most boats are equipped with a TV and DVD player. The crewmen work, cook, eat and sleep together, spending more time with one another than with their families at home.

The fishermen are constantly exposed to harsh weather and dangerous equipment but they underplay the very hazardous nature of their occupation. They say that new communication technology has helped minimise run-ins with storms and cyclones. Many admitted that accidents were frequently caused due to drinking, especially when men fell overboard and drowned. Worrying that their *seths* would find out or that they wouldn't be able to claim insurance in case of accidents, the fishers didn't openly talk about alcohol consumption. *Tindals* told me that they'd restricted drinking at sea, but drowning deaths are common in the harbours, where alcohol is more easily available and fishers less careful.

At the Veraval Government Hospital, the doctors and nurses said that the most common fishing-related cases they attended to are of diarrhoea and drowning. Incidents of drowning, they said, had considerably reduced over the years. Last year, the hospital had fifteen to twenty cases. Six were fatal, most of them migrant fishers. At the local marine police station, I was told that there were about four to five deaths every year. The *seths* pay for any medical expenses in case of accidents, but not other health issues, the fishers said.

In drowning cases, the *tindal* must first inform the *seth*, who sends an emergency ambulance to the jetty and the body is carried to the hospital. The marine police have a toll free number for emergencies at sea. In case of accidents/drowning incidents in deep sea (over 12 nm), the Coast Guard takes over. Satellite navigation systems allow them to track the fishing boat in case of emergencies. Once the body is brought to the hospital, it must carry out an inquest with the help of the police. The owner takes the post mortem and police report to the insurance company.

## **Grievances of the Srikakulam Fishermen**

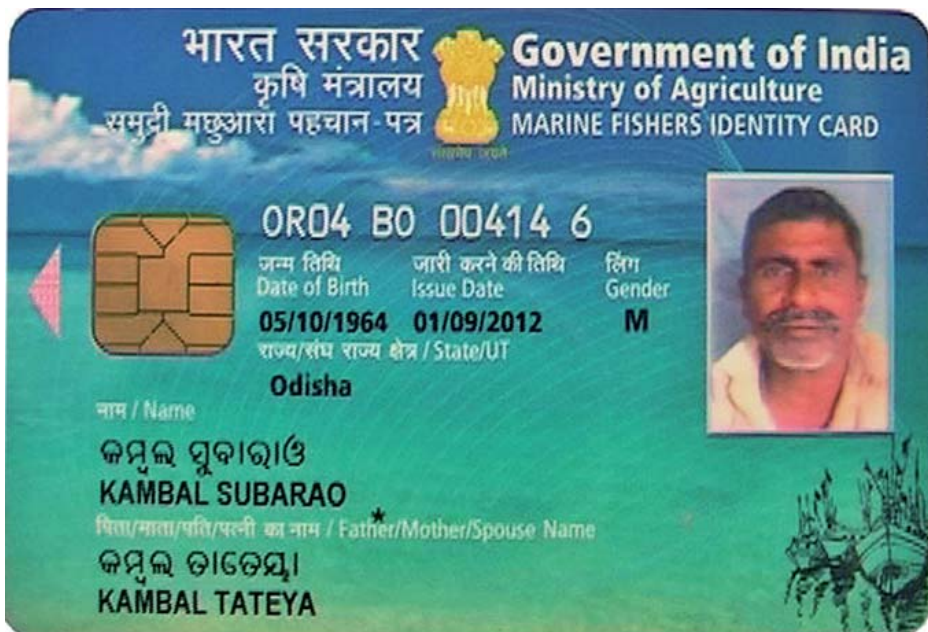
- 1) **Delays in issuing Biometric Cards:** A Central government scheme to issue electronic identification was launched in 2010 and implemented

by the maritime states and Union Territories along with Bharat Electronics Limited, Electronics Corporation of India Ltd and Indian Telephone Industries Ltd. A National Marine Fishers Database was planned to strengthen coastal security in the aftermath of the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. Security measures had been tightened in the Gujarat waters because of its proximity to Pakistan. The fishers feel that biometric cards would make it much easier for them to work as migrant fishers and also help with identification and insurance claims in case of accidents.

According to the Srikakulam fisheries department, 37,703 biometric cards have been distributed to the fishermen in the eleven coastal *mandals*. That's one forevery three fishers, as per the district coastal population in the 2010 Marine Fisheries Census, which seems very high. Anecdotaly, only about 20 per cent of the fishermen had cards in the villages sampled. It's possible that all the cards issued have been to women, since the men are never in the village at the time of data collection because they migrate for work.

Villagers expressed a lot of anger about this issue, especially in S. Machilesam, where they described how hundreds of rupees had to be spent to commute to the mandal headquarters, the collectorate

MANAS ROSHAN



A sample fishers biometric identity card issued by the central government.

at Srikakulam and to local police stations, paying small bribes on the way to speedup the process. Fishermen with over two decades of experience didn't have biometric cards. They claimed that data had been collected for many of them but they'd waited over two years and the cards hadn't arrived.

One official claimed a dispute between the government and the Electronic Corporation of India Limited, which provides the technology, had put the process on hold after biometric data for several thousand fishers had been collected. The Central government intended to issue cards to nearly 20 lakh (0.2 mn) fishermen—out of the 1.5 crore (10.5 mn) fishermen in the country—by June this year. (DNA, 2016)

- 2) **Caste status:** Most fishers in the villages visited belong to the Vadabalaji caste; about 60 per cent of Andhra Pradesh's fishers are Vadabalajis. The fisher castes have historically been counted in the Backward Classes (A Group: aboriginal and nomadic tribes). But this is a large grouping, containing 53 per cent of the state's population and hundreds of castes. The Vadabalajis have started to demand that they be counted among the ST or SC category so as to have better chances in government jobs and educational institutions. (Interestingly, fishers expressed a demand for both SC and ST status, giving explanations for both.)
- 3) **Accidents at sea:** A nagging issue expressed by both fishers who migrate and those who stay behind is the poor response from the state and boat owners in case of accidents at sea. The fishers said that accident insurance amounts only arrive for fatal accidents and never for serious injuries. Another major complaint is that the bodies of the dead were almost never sent back to the villages, though the *seths* claimed otherwise. The fishers who stay behind cite this as a major reason for not migrating though the dangers at sea are the same even in their home state. Some fishers also demanded compensation from both labour sending and receiving states for deaths at sea.
- 4) **Employment for the youth:** The recent arrests of several men in the district (possibly agents), who were taking over sixty children to work in Gujarat's boats, have shaken up the fisher population in the villages I have visited. They admit that several children accompany them on boats, working as deckhands and cooks while they learn fishing from the elders. This, they claim, is because their incomes are a lifeline for the families and educated youth lack the opportunities to pursue

other careers. This was, in fact, the case in the sample villages. Young men and women with a college education find that there are no jobs when they graduate. The fishers expressed the need for some leniency from the district administration or else better employment and educational opportunities.

## **Fishers Rights and the Legal Framework on Migration**

Marine fishing is one of the most dangerous occupations in the world. India's total marine fisher population is about 4 million (Marine Fisheries Census, CMFRI, 2010). But currently there's no one single law governing labour issues in fishing; rather they're thinly scattered in other legislations like the state Marine Fishing Regulation Acts, Minimum Wages Act 1948, The Unorganised Workers Social Security Act 2008, Child Labour Act 1986, Juvenile Justice Act 2015, etc. Additionally, the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act 1979 sets conditions on employers and contractors for terms of work of migrant workers, but these rules are almost never implemented.

The Work in Fishing Convention (WFC) adopted in Geneva at the 96th International Labour Organization Conference in 2007 was a step in prescribing standards for the living and working conditions on board fishing vessels.

NIKHIL ROSHAN



Appa Rao has been fishing for over 30 years, nine of which have been in Veraval. Before Gujarat, he worked for several years on trawlers at Vishakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh and Paradip in Odisha.

Though India participated in the adoption of the convention, it is yet to ratify the same. Once ratified, India can work towards the progressive implementation of all its provisions. The United Nations Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, unanimously adopted on 31 October 1995 by the Food and Agriculture Organization Conference, too, laid out a framework for 'safe, healthy and fair working and living conditions' in all fishing activities (FAO, 1995). Together, these laws and conventions provide a set of real regulations and best practices to compare the labour conditions of the Veraval fishers.

But, fishing work almost never falls in the purview of labour laws that govern the organised sector or operations involving a large number of workers. In the absence of a fisheries law, the labour department of each state can only enforce minimum wage rules. The Director of Industrial Safety and Health can only regulate working conditions in the fish processing units and not the boats.

Among the sampled migrant fishers, a lack of awareness about labour laws and rights seems to be as big a problem as the flouting of regulations by boat owners. This leaves small fishers and workers with few tools to bargain for wages, working hours, safety and other employment terms, and makes them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

- 1) **Minimum Age:** Laws prohibiting child labour in India fix the legal working age at eighteen years, with conditional permissions for younger workers. In the ILO Convention, minimum age for day work is stipulated as sixteen, and in case work carried on board could jeopardise the safety and involves night work, it's eighteen.

In Veraval, several minors serve in small capacities on the fishing boats. Most often, it is economic hardship that drives child labour in the fisheries sector. The administration, while ensuring minimum age standards are adhered to, could provide alternate livelihood opportunities to poor families and supervised vocational training for young fishers.

- 2) **Hours of Rest:** Although fatigue was identified as an important cause of accidents at sea, most countries, including India, do not have any regulation on hours of rest on board fishing vessels. In the Veraval boats, crew members sometimes work round the clock and periods of rest fall far short of international norms. As per the ILO Convention, the prescribed minimum hours of rest for large boats or fishing trips extending beyond three days are not less than ten hours in any twenty-hour period; and seventy-seven hours in any seven-day period.



- 3) **Crew List:** The Gujarat Marine Fishing Regulation Act 2003 requires every boat owner to maintain a log of crew members with their IDs on the boat and on shore. The ILO Convention also requires every fishing vessel to carry a crew list. In case of accidents, such a provision ensures that the identity of crew members is established and they receive state support and compensation. Crew lists are also crucial in case of arrest of fishers in foreign territories or waters. In the course of the study, I learnt that both the fisheries and customs departments in Veraval were understaffed, making implementation of such norms very difficult. The Coast Guard was more vigilant, routinely checking IDs, because of Gujarat's proximity to Pakistan and frequent conflicts over the waters shared by the two nations.
- 4) **Fisher's Work Agreement:** The Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act requires employers to draw up formal contracts with migrant workers so as to ensure equal rights and remuneration. The ILO Convention makes boat owners responsible for formulating a written work agreement describing working and living conditions on board. But in Veraval, none of the fishers enjoy the benefit of formal contracts. All transactions are based on verbal agreements, making it impossible for fishers to approach authorities in case of disputes.

NIKHIL ROSHAN



Trawlers depart from the Veraval harbour, Gujarat at dusk.

- 5) **Wages and Remuneration:** The ILO Convention incorporates measures to ensure that fishers, particularly migrant fishermen on the high seas, are paid minimum wage on a regular basis. In the case of Veraval fishers, the absence of a contract and the mode of paying salaries in advance make fishers beholden to the owners, sometimes allowing owners and skippers to impose arbitrary and exploitative terms. The labour officer in Veraval reported that the *khalasis* earn as per the minimum wage regulations in the State's fisheries, that is between Rs 270-300 per day (\$ 4-5) (\$ 1 = Rs 65).
- 6) **Accommodation and Food:** The ILO Convention stipulates that accommodation on board fishing vessels be of sufficient size and quality. It also regulates the quality and quantity of food and water on board. On Indian boats, accommodation and facilities are often abysmal. Indian laws don't regulate the quality of cabins, as is evident in the case of boats in Veraval. Several fishermen interviewed, who'd worked on large imported trawling vessels in Vishakhapatnam and Tamil Nadu, described more spacious and hygienic accommodation and sanitation facilities. A Gujarat government scheme provides toilets to boat owners on demand, but the fishers said that most owners didn't opt for one to save space on the deck. Even the fishers who have toilets on board only use them when the boats are parked in the jetty and not while they are at sea.
- 7) **Occupational Safety and Medical Care:** The Marine Fishing Regulation Act requires every boat to carry one lifeboat, a lifejacket for each crew member and two lifebuoys. It stipulates several other safety measures like flares. But the fishers said that most boats carried no flares, lifejackets or boats and only a single lifebuoy. As per the ILO Convention, at least one fisher is to be trained in first aid. For the first time, it recognised fishers' rights to timely medical treatment ashore. In Veraval, boats do carry a rudimentary medical kit and boat owners bear medical expenses for any accidents while fishing. Another problem is the lack of awareness about health and hygiene. Local officials from the fisheries department and the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) in both states claimed that regular awareness camps were held with fishers on health and sanitation. But these interactions were with boat owners and rarely included the fishers. I was able to observe this on my visit to Veraval on a day when the state officials and boat owners had launched a Swachh Bharat

programme in the town. Local fishers and school children were urged to participate but the migrant fishers were absent, out at sea.<sup>14</sup>

### Explaining Migration

- 8) **Economic factors:** The earnings of fishers in Gujarat are significantly higher than in Andhra Pradesh. Fishing in trawlers, the men are able to make as much as Rs 25,000 (\$ 385) per month and Rs 9,000 (\$ 138) per month, as skippers and crewmen respectively. On the other hand, 90 per cent of the crafts in Andhra Pradesh are non-mechanized (100 per cent in Srikakulam).<sup>15</sup> Fishing in a small *teppa* or traditional craft, a fisher would be lucky to earn Rs 200 (\$ 3) after a day's work; sometimes, nothing at all. Comparing socio-economic indicators in the two states also explains why Gujarat sees more private investment in boats and also offers the promise of prosperity to the fishers. According to the Marine Fisheries Census, 2010, 97 per cent of Andhra's fishers are below poverty line while only 25 per cent of their counterparts in Gujarat are poor. Other indicators too pointed to more prosperity in Gujarat: household incomes, land and asset ownership, etc.<sup>16</sup>
- 9) **Marine fishing infrastructure and opportunities:** The opportunities for marine fishers in the two states are also markedly different. While in Andhra Pradesh, marine fish production accounts for only 24 per cent of total production, in Gujarat it's 87 per cent. Gujarat's fishing harbours are able to accommodate almost 40,000 boats while the sole Vishakhapatnam harbour in Andhra Pradesh has fewer boats and jobs for fishers. Gujarat also has a highly developed market with fish wholesalers, processing units, storage and sorting facilities and other ancillary industries like boat yards and ice factories. Such infrastructure, on this scale, hasn't been constructed in Andhra Pradesh.
- 10) **Gujarat's entrepreneurial culture:** Kolis and *kharwas* (both Hindus and Muslims) are the two communities engaged in fishing in Gujarat. Traditionally involved in a range of maritime vocations, many exclusively moved to fishing with the decline of traditional Arabian Sea trade. But the state's entrepreneurial culture doesn't favour manual labour on the boats. So, they've had to bring people from the outside. This is perhaps reflected in data from the last census. Of the 24,483

14 This section refers extensively to the article 'From Informal "Co-adventurers" to Formal Workers?' on the ILO Work in Fishing Convention 2007 (Mathew S, 2010).

15 Marine Census, 2010.

16 Socio Economic and Caste Census 2011.

recorded fisher population in Veraval, only 25 per cent were actively engaged in fishing and another 28 per cent in allied activities.

Another sign of emphasis on entrepreneurship is in the curriculum of fisheries colleges in the state, where the labour aspect of fishing seems almost invisible. At the Veraval College of Fisheries (affiliated to the Junagadh Agricultural University), two courses are on offer to undergraduate students: the Rural Fisheries Work Experience Programme (RFWEP), where students are exposed to business models and technologies at fish processing units and aquaculture farms; and the Experiential Learning Programme (ELP), in which students learn the complete supply chain of fish foods and by-products, from purchase to marketing and culinary training.

Simultaneously, a cultural puritanism has also seeped into Gujarati Hindu culture with the resulting changes in public life, dietary choices, etc. The richer *kharwas* among the boat-owning classes that I met, though proud of their caste, seemed to identify themselves more as businessmen than fisherfolk. One boat owner described how his son, studying commerce in a college in Rajkot, preferred to eat vegetarian food in his hostel mess, because most of his friends didn't eat fish or meat like him.

- 11) Informal labour practices in fishing:** By all accounts migration of fishers, right from workers to officials and researchers in the industry, from Srikakulam to Gujarat began in the mid- to late-1980s, coinciding with the boom in the latter's marine fishing industry. But there was no explanation for why migration was high in certain districts or villages and not in others. One theory is the informal nature of employment in the industry. No work agreements are drawn up between owner and crew and the state has no presence in the labour aspect, except in issuing identity cards to fishers. Consequently, hiring and recruitment work through word of mouth, with early migrants setting off a trend and experienced hands hiring and taking fellow villagers along.

### **Fisheries Department, Veraval**

The department's responsibilities include:

- 1) Registration of fishing vessels
- 2) Subsidies and other welfare measures
  - Diesel: 24 per cent of weight of fuel, determined by the engine capacity, in four categories. An estimated 3,723 (or 45 per cent of registered boats) had availed of the scheme.

- Boat utilities: solar lamps, life-saving equipment, nets, toilets, boat insulation for storage, GPS and fishfinders.
  - Cycle boxes for door-to-door fish vendors.
  - Construction and maintenance of jetties and other infrastructure like towers, lighting, etc.
  - Accident insurance: Rs 1 lakh (0.1 mn) Central government group accident insurance cover for active fishermen in case of disability and Rs 2 lakhs (0.2 mn) in case of deaths.
- 3) Promotion of aquaculture
- Brackish water prawn farming: training, subsidy for construction and renovation, etc.
  - Fish seed production and fish farms
- 4) Issue of biometric cards: Electronic identification for fishers, licensing fishing in all coastal and inland waters.

MANAS ROSHAN



An NREGA site in Srikurmam, Andhra Pradesh where men and women earn up to Rs 150 (\$ 2.5) for a day's work digging a pond to conserve rain water.

## FISH PROCESSING UNITS

Gujarat is a major exporter of frozen fish and fish products and has several state-of-the-art processing units with highly developed networks for sourcing fish and supply chains to markets abroad. According to the Seafood Exporters Association of India, there are about eighty-three EU-approved units in Gujarat, spread over Veraval, Porbandar and Mangrol. Of these seventy are in Veraval, employing about 25,000 people.

Ninety per cent of their labour force is women, preferred because the work demands finesse, and women are perceived to have nimble hands for the job. Men are employed in various supervisory roles and for loading, maintenance, etc. Work in the processing units usually follows the fishing calendar, with most of the work from September to April. Workers' payments are as per state minimum wage.

During this study, I visited two such processing units in the region: Jinny Marine in Veraval and Silver in Porbandar. Jinny Marine, one of the major exporters in Gujarat, is managed by Kenny Thomas, who is also the vice president of the Seafood Exporters Association of India. The company, founded in 1995, chiefly produces processed forms of squid, prawn and calamari, which it exports to several European countries like Greece, Spain and Italy. It has a value-add capacity (finished product) of 30 tonnes a day and a freezing capacity of 120 tonnes.

Jinny Marine employs about 400 women in processing work, of which about forty are migrants from Assam and Bihar. In the 1980s and '90s, most of the women workers were recruited from Kerala and other southern states. Today, the workforce is almost entirely Gujarati, because the export boom has led to higher pays and improved labour practices as a result of regulations by importing countries.

Unlike the work on boats, labour standards in the processing units are monitored by both government agencies and international bodies. Company owners said they dealt with close to sixty government agencies on matters ranging from licensing to customs, pollution to labour. Western countries are also now pushing for fair practices in food sourcing. Besides state regulations, the market too has seen a shift towards responsible business. Some Veraval factories, for example, deal with supermarket clients who are members of Sedex, a global not-for-profit organisation that aims to promote ethical practices in global supply chains. Its compliance audits now cover labour, health and safety standards in their ambit.

Fishing operations, on the other hand, are largely invisible in the eyes of the state and the market in the absence of more stringent laws and traceability requirements in food supply agreements.

NIKHIL ROSHAN



Women, mostly Gujaratis, form 90 percent of the labour force in the processing units. The products are packed and labelled for supermarkets in Spain, Portugal and Italy.

### **Impact of Migration on Family and Village**

Wives and other family members of at least five migrant fishers were interviewed for this study. I also had the opportunity to spend two days with a fisher family in Srikurmam in Srikakulam. Interestingly, the wives of *tindals* don't go out to work when their husbands are away in Veraval. They mostly cook and clean at home, spending more time with their children. The ones with TVs occupied their afternoons and evenings watching serials. A few fishers said that they'd be ashamed if their wives work when they are earning enough to support the family. This wasn't the case in poorer homes, especially among the non-migrants. The Vadabalaji caste, though patrilineal, traditionally accorded equal importance to female labour. In the local fishing industry the women have their work clearly cut out for them: sorting and cleaning fish catch after its landing and selling the produce at the market (Schoembucher, 1985). Today, the women not engaged in fishing-related work earn small amounts selling fruits and nuts at arterial roads.

Many sell agricultural produce and cheap consumer goods on the busy National Highway 16, which runs parallel to the coast and connects Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

With greater prosperity, aspirations have also changed among migrant fishers' families. Where a generation ago, most fishers had studied only till secondary school (a few had completed class 10), the sons and daughters now held BSc and BCom degrees. One respondent in S Machilesam, who'd spent twenty-five years on fishing boats, was a fifth-grade dropout but his son was a graduate now working on a merchant ship in Kakinada. The son had joined him a few times on the Veraval boats but he didn't like the work. The fisher's daughter too had married a sailor in Vishakhapatnam. Another migrant fisher in Patha Dibbalapalem hadn't ever taken his nineteen-year-old son to fish. The son was studying to finish a BSc in chemistry. He wanted a private job in the city, he said.

But the new generation sees its hopes dashed in the labour market, where they can't compete with thousands of other men and women with the same or better qualifications. Most young male respondents with degrees haven't found employment and some have even gone back to fishing. Their voices now join the old chorus demanding Scheduled Tribe status for the Vadabalajjis. This, they said, would better their chances of admission into government colleges and jobs.

### **Child Labour in Fishing**

On 3 August 2015, a child rights NGO called Helping Hands Association filed a complaint with the Srikakulam collector alleging that children were being trafficked from the fishing villages in the district to Gujarat. The NGO provided a list of sixty-six such children from the villages of Badivanipetta, Budagutlapalem, D Machilesam, K D Palem and K Machilesam.

The collector launched a rescue operation and officials sent to the Srikakulam Road Railway Station (the only major station in the district) detained seventy-two children, between 6 August and 16 August. Criminal cases under Sections 371 and 374 of the Indian Penal Code, Section 26 of the Juvenile Justice Act and Sections 3 and 14 of the Child Labour Act, were filed against six persons accused of being agents or traffickers. The men are now on trial in the Srikakulam District Court. The children, meanwhile, were placed in welfare homes for a few days. By then a large group of their parents and other fishers had gathered at the collectorate and after they staged a dharna against the action, the children were eventually sent back home.

The district administration claims that the children are made to work for Rs 8000 (\$ 123) a month as deck hands and cooks on fishing boats. Their



families are given advances of Rs 40-50,000 (\$ 615-769) and the children have no way of returning till the end of the fishing season.

The collector, P.L. Narasimham, took great interest in this case and was very prompt in acting on the NGO's complaint. But his zeal seemed to ignore the economic conditions of the fisher families that compelled them to send their children to work on the boats.

### **Indian Fishermen in Pakistani Jails**

One serious problem for many fishers has been repatriation following arrest by the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency and navy, for fishing in the disputed waters between India and Pakistan. The issue of fishermen stranded in Pakistani jails comes up in Parliament time and time again.<sup>17</sup> In February 2015, 172 Indian fishermen in Pakistani prisons were released following a joint effort by the two countries to free innocent prisoners. The next month, the Minister for External Affairs SushmaSwaraj said in a written reply to Parliament that 352 Indian prisoners, including fishermen, were still in Pakistani jails (*Economic Times*, 2015). For the first time the ILO Convention recognises the repatriation rights of fishers. States are required to formulate laws to entitle fishers rights over commercial waters. (Mathew, 2010)

### **Migration Statistics**

A major challenge in studying migration and its effects is the scarcity of data available on migrant workers. The census is one source that researchers routinely turn to for broad statistics on movement. The National Sample Surveys also point to trends in migration. The Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act requires all employers and contractors to maintain logs and records of migrants registered with them. These are to be shared with state inspectors but it's not clear if the administration is required to maintain a full list of such workers.

It was recently reported that the Srikakulam district collectorate would establish a migration facilitation centre to monitor movement of workers and avoid any trafficking or child labour practices. At the time that this study was completed in November, 2016, no such centre had been set up in the district. Various departments turned to were themselves seeking data on migration. There is none, they all said.

The marine fisheries census, conducted every five years, does include questions on migrating family members in their questionnaire for fishers. But CMFRI told me that the responses on migration hadn't been accurately recorded.

---

<sup>17</sup> Lok Sabha Debates 2005.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Gujarat fishing industry's reliance on migrant labour still remains as it did ten years ago, although the numbers from Andhra Pradesh do seem to be decreasing, based on anecdotal evidence from the sample villages. Many have started to travel to Karnataka and Kerala, where, they claim, earnings are higher despite a commission system based on the quantity of the catch, which can be unpredictable. Mechanization of fishing operations hasn't been as rapid as to diminish the role of the workers on the boats. Unless there is a dramatic investment in more sophisticated vessels, the labour value in fishing will not change in the state. But developments in other states closer home, or even in Andhra Pradesh, could change the pattern of migration.

### Recommendations:

- 1) Contracts stipulating terms, working and rest hours, remuneration and minimum wage requirements, and safety regulations must be made mandatory between boat owners and crew members. Interstate migration law already requires such contracts. This would not only give fishers more bargaining powers, but also make them aware of their rights as per existing laws.
- 2) Governments of both labour-sending and receiving states should coordinate to document migration and also facilitate the transparent movement of labour so there is no infringement on the rights of workers. They could do so by organising training camps in *mandals* with large numbers of migrants.
- 3) Migrant fishers should be included in the unions or associations in both Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat. This would go a long way in the gradual formalisation of fishing work and giving fishers more knowledge of other markets at home and abroad.
- 4) District administrations, while acting to restrict child labour in fishing, should engage with fishers' economic problems. A survey of fisher families to understand educational and employment opportunities can be a first step. Vocational training and part-time employment under less hazardous conditions closer home can also be provided to men and women over fifteen years.
- 5) A single government body, preferably the fisheries department, should absorb all duties regarding labour issues in fishing. At present, the labour

department oversees minimum wage regulation but does not look into the working conditions and safety of the fishers. This is left to the fisheries department, who by their own admission are ill-equipped and too understaffed to fulfil this role.

- 6) Migration data should be collected in a more comprehensive manner. At present, the labour department is tasked to gather such data but it isn't doing so. The fisheries department should take up this role too if it is to oversee labour conditions.

Compared to the earnings of fishers in Kerala or Tamil Nadu, salaries in Gujarat are still very low but the migrant fishers do report improved standards of living back in their villages. But it is the responsibility of both Central and state governments to ensure that labour rights of fishers are protected, just like the interests of other workers. In this regard, the state seems to be lagging behind the market, which is able to provide more choices to the fishers. Travelling through the fishing ports of Gujarat, where entire towns are built around fisheries, it is remarkable that workers on the boats seem absent both physically and in talk about the industry. A stronger legal regime for work in fishing must be combined with efforts to include workers in the discourse on sustainable fisheries management.

NIKHIL ROSHAN



Women at work cleaning squid in a Jinny Marine factory in Veraval. Labour standards are much better regulated in the processing units, especially those exporting to Europe and North America, than in the fishing craft.

## REFERENCES

- Andhra Pradesh Fisheries Statistics: Government of Andhra Pradesh. <http://apfisheries.gov.in/content1.php?U=9%20&&%20T=Statistics> [Accessed 14 June 2016]
- Andhra Pradesh Fisheries Budget 2014-15: Government of Andhra Pradesh. <http://apfisheries.gov.in/content1.php?U=8%20&&%20T=Planning> [Accessed 14 June 2016]
- Census of India, 2001: Migration Tables. [http://censusindia.gov.in/Data\\_Products/Data\\_Highlights/Data\\_Highlights\\_link/data\\_highlights\\_D1D2D3.pdf](http://censusindia.gov.in/Data_Products/Data_Highlights/Data_Highlights_link/data_highlights_D1D2D3.pdf) [Accessed 14 June 2016]
- CMFRI, 2010: Marine Fisheries Census 2010. <http://eprints.cmfri.org.in/9002/> [Accessed 14 June 2016]
- CMFRI, 2013: Marine fish landings in Gujarat for the year 2013. <http://www.cmfri.org.in/Gujarat.html> [Accessed 14 June 2016]
- Gujarat Fisheries, 2013: Commissioner of Fisheries, Agriculture and Co-operation department, Government of Gujarat, Annual Report 2013-14. <https://cof.gujarat.gov.in/Images/commissioneroffisheries/pdf/Vikash-yojna-2013-14.pdf> [Accessed 14 June 2016]
- Lok Sabha Debates, 2005: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/421839/> [Accessed 14 June 2015]
- National Federation of Fisheries Cooperatives Ltd, 2016: National Survey on Database Fisheries Cooperatives. <http://www.fishcopfed.in/DataBank> [Accessed 14 June 2016]
- Socio Economic Caste Census, 2011: Provisional Data of Rural India. <http://secc.gov.in/reportlistContent> [Accessed 14 June 2016]
- FAO, 1995: Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Adopted by the twenty-eighth session of the FAO Conference on 31 October 1995. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-v9878e.pdf> [Accessed 14 June 2016]
- ILO, 2007: Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188). [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:312333](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312333) [Accessed 14 June 2016]
- UNESCO, 2013: Social Inclusion of Internal Migrants in India. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002237/223702e.pdf> [Accessed 14 June 2016]
- ICSF: States Fishing Castes. <http://indianfisheries.icsf.net/images/stories/indian/EAP.pdf> [Accessed 14 June 2016]
- Schoembucher E, 1985: 'Equality and Hierarchy in Maritime Adaptation: Importance of Flexibility in the Social Organization of a South Indian Fishing Caste' in *Ecology and Human Adaptation: Studies in Cultural and Social Perspectives*, ed., S.M. Channa. Cosmo Publications: India, 1998. <https://books.google.co.in/books?id=hSwtpCjSuw4C&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false> [Accessed 14 June 2016]

- Dholakia Ravindra, 2007: 'Sources of Economic Growth and Acceleration in Gujarat', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 3 March 2007. <http://www.epw.in/journal/2007/09/special-articles/sources-economic-growth-and-acceleration-gujarat.html> [Accessed 14 June 2016]
- Mathew S, 2000: Gujarat Fisheries: Time to Move from Exploitative to Conservation and Management Regimes. Workshop on Current Situation in Fisheries Sector in Gujarat, Gujarat Institute of Development Research, Ahmedabad.
- Mathew S, 2010: 'From Informal "Co-adventurers" to Formal Workers? ILO's Work in Fishing Convention, 2007', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30 January 2010.
- DNA, 2016: 'Biometric Cards for 20 Lakh Fishermen in India by June'. <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-biometric-cards-for-20-lakh-fishermen-in-india-by-june-2162511> [Accessed 14 June 2016]
- Economic Times*, 2015: '352 Indian prisoners lodged in Pakistan jails: Government'. [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-03-04/news/59767261\\_1\\_prisoners-172-indian-fishermen-india-and-pakistan](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-03-04/news/59767261_1_prisoners-172-indian-fishermen-india-and-pakistan) [Accessed on 14 June 2016]
- Indian Express*, 2016: 'Farm distress: Monsoon isn't the only spoiler'. <http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/farm-distress-monsoon-isnt-the-only-spoiler-2786536/> [Accessed on 14 June 2016]
- The Hindu*, 2016: 'Safe Migration Facilitation Centre in Srikakulam'. <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-telangana/safe-migration-facilitation-centre-in-srikakulam/article8439637.ece> [Accessed on 14 June 2016]

## INTERVIEWS

### Gujarat

V.M. Chavda – Assistant Professor, College of Fisheries, Veraval

Daji David – Marketing Manager, Silver Fish Products, Porbandar

A.Y. Desai – Principal, College of Fisheries, Junagadh Agricultural University, Veraval

J.M. Dwivedi – Deputy Director, Office of Industrial Safety and Health, Junagadh

Damji Fofandi – Vice President, Samyukta Macchimar Boat Association, Veraval

Tulsi Gohel – President, Kharwa Samyukta Macchimar Boat Association, Veraval

Dr Kishor Haryane – General Physician, Veraval Government Hospital

Sreenath K.R. – Scientist, Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Veraval

Vinay Kumar – Scientist, Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Veraval

V. Kumar – Inspector, Custom House, Veraval

Jayesh Nandania – Nurse, Veraval Government Hospital

A.T. Painter – Assistant Labour Commissioner, GirSomnath

Ramesh bhai – Boat owner, Veraval

C.D. Rawal – Police Station Officer, Somnath Marine Police Station

Jagdish Tandel – Director, Fisheries Department, Veraval

D.N. Thakkar – Labour Officer, Veraval

Kenny Thomas – Managing Partner, Jinny Marine, and Vice President, Seafood Exporters Association of India

### Andhra Pradesh

Yakub Basha – Deputy Director, Srikakulam Fisheries Department

Dr Shubhadeep Ghosh – Scientist, Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Visakhapatnam (Telephone)

M. Phalgunaraju – District President, Fishermen Welfare Association, Srikakulam

P.L. Narasimham – Collector, Srikakulam

Satya Narayanan – Welfare Officer, Srikakulam Fisheries Department

Jagannatha Rao – District President, Human Rights Forum, Srikakulam

---

## **ANNEXURE I: SRIKAKULAM WORKSHOP**

### **Workshop: Migrant Fishermen from Andhra Pradesh in the Gujarat Marine Fishing Industry**

Place: Press Club, 7 Roads Junction, Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh

Date: 14 March 2016

#### **Introduction**

The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) Trust is a non-governmental organization that works towards the establishment of equitable, gender-just, self-reliant and sustainable fisheries, particularly in the small-scale, artisanal sector.

Between May and July 2016, I conducted a study on behalf of ICSF, recording the living and working conditions of migrants from Andhra Pradesh's Srikakulam district in the fishing industry in Veraval, Gujarat. The study also documented the reasons for migration from their home state and the socio-economic effects of migration on the families of the fishers.

As a follow up to the study, ICSF conducted this workshop in Srikakulam to share the findings of the report with all stakeholders, including fisher families, fisheries associations and welfare organisations, and government officials.

The ICSF workshop was organised with the support of the local fishing community in Srikakulam, in particular Jaganadha Rao and M Phalgunaraju of the District Fishermen's Welfare Association and Human Rights Forum. I thank Arjilli Dasu, executive secretary of the District Fishermen's Youth Welfare Association, Vishakhapatnam, for his help in organising the workshop and moderating the discussions. I thank the Fisheries Department of Srikakulam for their participation in the workshop and their inputs during the research for the report. The deputy director of fisheries, Varanasi Krishnamurty, provided helpful feedback on the recommendations in the study and responded to the queries from fishers at the workshop. I also thank the assistant director of fisheries, Nirmala Kumari, and the fisheries development officer, Y Satyanarayana, for their participation. Finally, I thank all the other organisations and local fishers for their participation and support for such a workshop to discuss the livelihoods of migrant fishermen, who are often overlooked in the discourse on fisheries management. My thanks also to the former deputy director of fisheries, Yakub Basha, and the collector of Srikakulam, Dr P L Narasimham, who gave me valuable inputs for the study.

The workshop was attended by nearly forty people. Of these ten were women, some working in fish marketing in Srikakulam and Visakhapatnam. Others included families of migrating fishermen.

The overall objectives of the workshop were:

- To disseminate the findings of the ICSF field report on the living and working conditions of migrant fishers and discuss the recommendations with the community and all stakeholders.
- To get the feedback from the community, who contributed time, energy and information for the study.
- To provide a space for dialogue between fishing communities and the local administration and to explore possibilities for further action.

Each year, over 25,000 fishers from Andhra Pradesh's coastal districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Vishakhapatnam travel to Veraval and Porbandar in Gujarat to work on marine fishing boats. They spend eight months away from their homes, going on long fishing trips—between fifteen and twenty-two days at a time—travelling as far as Karnataka and Kerala down the western coast of India. The numbers are anecdotal estimates because the government has no measure of the number of men who migrate. Despite the economic gains they make by migrating, the workers are almost invisible, never present in their home states to be counted among the local fishers, and socially and linguistically cut off from the community in the labour-receiving state. Consequently, their concerns remain neglected and they live and work in conditions that are often exploitative.

A point that came up repeatedly during the workshop was the need for proper documentation of migration by the governments of both states, the one from which the fishers were migrating and the one to which they were going. This will help in framing policies directed at migrant workers and also provide families with a channel for redress in cases where fishers go missing or are hurt while working away from home.

It'd be useful to thematically discuss the points raised in the workshop; the themes are framed as problems highlighted by the community, the recommendations in the report and finally the response from the administration.

- 1) **Infrastructure:** As pointed out by the migrating fishermen in the study, one of the factors triggering the movement of fishers to Gujarat is the lack of opportunities for marine fishing in Andhra Pradesh, particularly Srikakulam, where fishing infrastructure is underdeveloped.



Unlike Gujarat, which has several fishing harbours and many landing centres for bigger, mechanized vessels, Andhra Pradesh has only Visakhapatnam, which too has a lower capacity to house boats compared to Veraval. Private investment in boats and equipment is also low because the government outlay for subsidies to fishermen is much lower than in Gujarat. As a result, fishing operations in Srikakulam is on a much smaller scale, on smaller, non-mechanized boats and the earnings are far less. Most migrants see no alternative but to travel to Gujarat or Kerala, where the operations are much bigger. The participants at the workshop expressed the same sentiment—that they needed more support from the government.

Narasimha Rao, president of the District Fisheries Cooperative Society, said that at present only 30 per cent of capital inputs—boats, engines, nets and equipment—is covered by government subsidies. He said that the fishers demand the government share be raised to 75 per cent.

Arjilli Dasu, executive secretary of the District Fishermen's Youth Welfare Association, said that the government had not looked into the infrastructure needs of local fishers, especially port storage for fish. He said that fish being a perishable commodity, cold storages are very important. There were almost none in the district, except on the highway to Vishakhapatnam. Chintapalli Suryanarayana, a fishermen's leader, claimed that little of the National Fisheries Development Board's sizable budget is utilized for small fishermen.

The deputy director of fisheries, V Krishnamurty, raised several points in response to the fishers' demands for better infrastructure. He acknowledged the district's lack of harbours and landing centres but said that harbours are expensive, costing over Rs 250 crore (2.5 bn) and that the department's funds were limited. One new development was that the district collector, Dr P L Narasimham, had recently held a meeting with coastal village panchayats in Srikakulam and promised to build two new harbours: in Bavanapadu and Etcherla. The fisheries department is also planning to build fish landing centres in two spots: in Manchellapeta and Rallapeta. The estimated cost of each is roughly Rs 30 crore (0.30 bn) and the department is waiting for the feasibility study report for the same. Mr Krishnamurty also discussed the possibility of raising the budget for subsidies on fishing craft. This year, he said, subsidies of twenty-fiveboats have been sanctioned, which he acknowledged is not enough.

Another problem is the delay in issuing biometric cards for identification of fishers. In the villages visited for the study, only about 20 percent of the fishermen had cards which would have allowed them to fish in any part of the country. The lack of identification is a nagging problem especially for the migrants in Gujarat, where concerns about security are much more serious. The fishers reported being routinely pulled up by the Coast Guard for not having proper ID. They now have to approach the fisheries department every year to get temporary licences issued. Fishermen with over two decades of experience didn't have biometric cards. They claimed that data had been collected for many of them but the cards hadn't arrived even after two years.

The fisheries department acknowledged that this is a problem. Mr Krishnamurty said that the department had invited tenders from tech companies to collect data and issue biometric cards but the response was very poor. Even after contracts had been signed, there have been disagreements and the contracts have either fallen through or there have been several errors in data collection and in the technology.

- 2) **Accidents at sea:** In the study both fishers who migrate and those who stay behind spoke of the poor response from the state and boat owners in case of accidents at sea. The fishers said that accident insurance amounts only arrive for fatal accidents and never for serious injuries. Another major complaint was that the bodies of the dead were almost never sent back to the villages, though the *seths* claim otherwise. The fishers who stay behind cite this as a major reason for not migrating, though the dangers at sea are the same even in their home state. Some fishers also demanded compensation from both labour sending and receiving states for deaths at sea.

In the workshop, participants expressed the need for better documentation of migrating fishermen and of accident cases. They demanded that the government ensure that insurance amounts be paid and the government also provide compensation to fishermen's families. At present, both the Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh governments have insurance schemes promising Rs 2 lakh (0.02 mn) to fishers for accidental deaths, but all participants agreed that the insurance was rarely paid. Boat owners must be made to strictly adhere to guidelines for reporting of accidents and properly documenting such cases for insurance claims. Language is a major barrier, with post mortems and police inquests filed in Gujarati. It was pointed out that in several cases of heart attacks while fishing, families had been denied insurance because heart disease was cited

as a natural cause and couldn't be counted as accidental deaths. The participants also demanded that the Andhra government pay the families compensation in cases of deaths.

Mr Krishnamurty said that the department will discuss the possibility of all documentation being made in English with the district administration and their counterparts in Gujarat.

- 3) **Contracts:** Contracts between boat owners and crew members, stipulating terms, working and rest hours, remuneration and minimum wage requirements, and safety regulations must be made mandatory. The Interstate Migrant Workers Act already requires such contracts. The participants at the workshop agreed that such contracts are a must so as to ensure fishers have more bargaining powers. Several speakers said that the lack of awareness about rights was a problem among fishers, many of whom were middle- and high-school dropouts.
- 4) **Caste status:** Most fishers in the study were from the Vadabalaji caste; about 60 percent of Andhra Pradesh's fishers are Vadabalajis. The fisher castes have historically been counted in the Backward Classes but their demand to be counted in the ST category has repeatedly come up, especially during election time in the state. The ST status, according to the fishers, will give them access to government jobs and educational institutions. While most participants agreed that this is a legitimate demand, they were more muted than the fishers interviewed for the study. They acknowledged that their demands were up against several legal and constitutional hurdles, as well as the political realities of the state. Mr Krishnamurty too pointed out that this is a political issue that the department can do nothing about.
- 5) **Training for migrating fishermen:** A persistent problem observed during the study was how difficult it is for the government or NGOs to reach out to migrating fishermen because they are, on one hand, away from their homes in Srikakulam, and on the other, rarely on the shore in Gujarat because of the punishing working hours on the boats. Most government awareness drives were only attended by local fishermen or boat owners and the migrants were left out. Several speakers at the workshop raised this point and stressed on the need for special training programs, with a focus on health and safety issues, minimum wage and other labour regulations. M Ramarao, a local fisher and member of the Human Rights Forum, and Surada Raja Rao, general secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Sampradaya Machikara Sangam, asked for an information centre, either under the fisheries or

labour departments, to oversee all migration and asked that the district appoint one official for migrant welfare. Mr Krishnamurthy promised that the fisheries department will conduct training programs which will include components on migration.

- 6) Effects of migration on women and families:** In Srikakulam, changing economic circumstances in the coastal villages has led to a social churn whose effects can be seen both in the occupational choices of the younger generation and the lifestyles of families. Among the migrating fisher families, where traditionally fishing was divided between men and women, now, women are either not working outside of their homes or are engaged in other trades: selling agricultural produce in urban centres, starting small businesses, etc. Most of the youth interviewed in the study also expressed no interest in fishing. Those who were college educated aspired to move to other jobs; many young men had found jobs on merchant shipping vessels and some women were training to be teachers. At the workshop, all the women said their children didn't want to work in the fishing industry.

Mr Krishnamurthy also spoke about the social effects of migration: on one hand, families were separated but, on the other, living conditions in the villages had improved because of higher earnings. But, in villages where several men had left traditional fishing to migrate to other states, women couldn't find consistent work for the eight months that men were absent.

Several speakers spoke about how the men were more careless with their health because of the harsh work and travel schedules. Dietary habits had changed and the men also neglected occupational health problems like allergies and infections.

The testimonies of the women at the workshop illuminated several vulnerabilities that the men hadn't discussed during interviews for the study. V Gannamma, the wife of a migrant, told us her husband had been missing for three years. He worked as a crew member on a Veraval boat but she had no news from the boat owners or his fellow fishers on his whereabouts. Gannamma has three children, all girls over sixteen years, and the financial strain was tremendous. She has temporarily found NREGA work. Satyavathi, also the wife of a migrant fisher, is a fish vendor in Srikakulam. Her husband has been working in Veraval for ten years and she said they were comfortable and their combined earnings helped them build a house and educate their two children. Her brother, also a fisherman in Gujarat, had had a different

experience. He'd been arrested by the Pakistan marine police and jailed for nearly three years and then released but he continued to travel to Gujarat.

Lakshmi, a coordinator with SWEEP, an NGO in Srikakulam, spoke about health problems common among fishers and particularly about cases of child labour among migrating fishers. In 2015, her NGO had worked closely with the district administration to rescue over sixty boys travelling to Gujarat to work on boats. The NGO now oversees the education of these boys and also counsels migrant fishers' families on health and education.

**7) Pollution and Encroachment of Fishing Grounds by Industry:**

An issue that the study was not able to delve into in detail but which came up repeatedly in the workshop was the fishers' concerns about the entry of several industries into coastal Andhra Pradesh, particularly in Srikakulam district. Chintapally Suryanarayana, a fishers' leader, pointed out how several big ports, power plants and pharmaceutical factories were blocking off fishers' access to the sea and the surrounding coastline. Sand mining, rampant on the Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu coast to fuel the booming construction sector, had

MANAS ROSHAN



Workshop on Migrant Fishermen from Andhra Pradesh in the Gujarat Marine Fishing Industry, 14th March 2016.

also led to the degradation of coastal habitats, soil erosion and the loss of mangroves. The resultant discharge into the sea had also led to a reduction in fish catch over the last decade. Madan Mohan, an agricultural scientist, and Kona Ramu, a member of HRF, were of the belief that the declining fish catch and the resulting loss of earnings for local fishers were the main reasons for migration. The fishers demanded that pollution by these industries be kept in check through tighter government regulations and also that the fishers be offered employment as they slowly move out of marine fishing occupations.

## Conclusion

The ICSF workshop on Andhra Pradesh's migrant fishermen served as a fruitful space for dialogue between the fishing community and the local administration. With the help of the ICSF study and the recommendations from the workshop, the fisheries department aims to initiate a plan for the welfare of migrant fishers along with the district administration and their counterparts in Veraval. A first step could be to launch a migration information and facilitation centre under the collectorate, which had been announced in 2015. As discussed in the study as well as the workshop, there is a serious lack of credible information on migration, both numbers and the modalities of recruitment, work and remuneration for migrating fishermen.

MANAS ROSHAN



Participants at the Workshop.

## ANNEXURE II: WORKSHOP AGENDA

AGENDA	
10:30 – 11: 00	Registration
11: 00 – 11:30	<p><b>Welcome</b>  <b>Manas Roshan</b>, <i>Research Consultant,</i>  <i>International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)</i></p> <p><b>M Phalgunaraju</b>, <i>President,</i>  <i>District Fishers Welfare Association, Srikakulam</i></p> <p><b>Introduction to Workshop and Share Details of Field Report</b>  <i>ManasRoshan, Research Consultant, ICSF</i></p>
11:30 – 12:00	<b>Address : VranasiKrishnamurty</b> , <i>Deputy Director,</i> <i>Department of Fisheries, Srikakulam</i>
12:00 – 12:15	<i>Tea-break</i>
12:15 – 12:30	<p><b>Address – Migration and Problems of AP Fishers</b>  <i>Speaker: Arjilli Dasu, Executive Secretary</i>  <i>District Fishermens Youth Welfare Association,</i>  <i>Vishakhapatnam</i></p>
12:30 – 13:00	<p><b>Discussion – Securing Livelihoods of AP Fishers</b>  <i>Speakers: Chintapalli Suryanarayana,</i>  <i>Fishermen’s Leader, Srikakulam</i></p> <p><b>Narasimha Rao</b>, <i>President,</i>  <i>District Fisheries Cooperative Society, Srikakulam</i></p> <p><b>Surada Raja Rao</b>, <i>General Secretary,</i>  <i>Andhra Pradesh Sampradaya Machikara Sangam</i></p>
13:00 – 13:30	<p><b>Discussion – Women’s Experience of Migration and Fisheries Management</b>  <i>Speakers: V Gannamma and Satyavathi</i>  <i>(Families of migrant fishers)</i></p> <p><b>Lakshmi</b>, <i>Coordinator, Society for Welfare Education and Environmental Protection, Srikakulam</i></p>
13:30 – 14:00	<p><b>Group Discussion</b>  <b>Vote of Thanks</b>  <b>JagannadhaRao</b>, <i>Vice-President, Human Rights Forum</i>  <b>Manas Roshan</b></p>
14:00	<i>Lunch</i>







ICSF Occasional Paper

**A Study of Migrant Fishers from Andhra Pradesh  
in the Gujarat Marine Fishing Industry**

**Manas Roshan**



ICSF is an international NGO working on issues that concern fishworkers the world over. It is in status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN and is on ILO's Special List of Non-Governmental International Organizations. It also has Liaison Status with FAO. As a global network of community organizers, teachers, technicians, researchers and scientists, ICSF's activities encompass monitoring and research, exchange and training, campaigns and action, as well as communications.

**ISBN 978 93 80802 67 1**