

WIEGO Law Pilot Project on the Informal Economy

Fish Workers - Background Note

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Fish workers in India are faced with many challenges. Mechanisation, industrialisation of production processes and the globalization of the markets has transformed the fishing sector. The changes are both positive and negative. The most notable negative outcome is the over-exploitation of the marine resources resulting in the marginalization of traditional fishing methods and the communities.

India has a large coastline, approximately 8,118 km long. After the declaration of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in 1977, the area available to India is 2.02 million sq. km, comprising 0.86 million sq. km on the west coast, 0.56 million sq. km on the east coast and 0.60 million sq. km around the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Nearly three million fish workers depend on fishing for their livelihood along this coastline. Additionally, there are a large number of fish workers engaged in inland fishing on the numerous rivers that crisscross the country. In 2005-2006, the contribution from the inland fisheries of (3.75 million tonnes) to the total fish production of the country was much higher than that of the marine fishers (2.81 million tonnes). The inland fisheries sector includes fish farming and aquaculture and a large number of workers are employed in fish farms.¹ In fact, there has been policy shift within the fisheries sector, towards promoting inland fishing, in particular aquaculture, in recent years.

Marine Fishing:

The majority of workers in the *harvesting of fish* are male. These workers could be a part of the mechanized, semi-mechanised or traditional fishing communities. Four types of employment status can be enumerated in the fisheries sector – self-employment, wage labour, family labour and income sharers. It must be noted that some daily wagers are in effect income sharers. This system provides incentive to workers to reduce costs and enhance productivity even without the presence of supervisors. The majority of workers in *fish selling* are men. But women workers are also to be found in the sale of fish in various markets along the coast.

However, in *fish processing*, the majority of the labour force are women and in several areas migrant women workers from Kerala. Work in a fish processing unit is broadly divided into two parts, the pre-processing part that involves peeling and cleaning of raw material and the second part involves grading and packing of the product. The pre-processing engages both daily wage workers and contract workers (largely migrant women). The second stage is dominated by migrant contract workers.

“The combination of the two types of labour is especially important to the work process as the contract employees can be deployed for work whenever raw material

¹ A.V.Vijayan, Work in Fishing Convention 2007: Are We Expecting Too Much?, *Labour File*. May-Aug 2007.

reaches the unit, even if it is at night and the workers are asleep. They can be made to work for long hours without anyone raising questions about the propriety of such work. Thus the utilisation of contract labour in a captive environment works to the advantage of capital. This is also an important factor in cutting the cost of production, as the raw material kept frozen for a longer time would also push up the company's cost of inventories. Some units have separate fish peeling and cleaning outfits, apart from the processing plant."²

The organization of fish workers who work for a wage has not been very strong. It is largely the workers from the traditional fishing communities, who are self-employed, that are better organized. A large number of these battles have been against large scale fishing and mechanization, battles for access to common property resources and to protect the interests of the small operators. This sector is not homogenous. The concerns of the workers depend on the work being carried out – harvesting, processing, marketing, etc. Additionally, the concerns of the marine fish workers are different from that of the inland fish workers. Women and men workers also face different set of issues as they are almost exclusively engaged in different activities. Further, it is clear that the needs of the self-employed are distinct from those wage or income sharing arrangements, and these need to be addressed by a comprehensive law on the subject.

While no comprehensive legislation has been attempted for this sector, the broad policy-needs of the sector have been identified by the Murari Committee report. This report submitted in 1996, made several recommendations. Among the major recommendations of the Murari Committee were:

- ensuring an adequate supply of fuel at subsidised rates to fisherfolk
- the formulation of marine fishing regulations in the entire Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ),
- an end to joint ventures with foreign entities, and banning foreign fishing vessels from Indian waters
- the establishment of a fisheries ministry at the centre.
- the withdrawal of Aquaculture Authority Bill;
- implementation of Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification and ensuring “traditional and customary right of the fishing community” in the coastal zone;
- an end to legislative attempts to dilute CRZ notification through amendments and an end to attempts to displace fisher people from coastal zone and islands like Jambu and Khirisai of Orissa;
- cancelling all the fishing licences to foreign vessels issued by the commerce ministry and enacting legislation to give the right to own and manage water bodies; fish resources and fishing implements to the fishing communities that depend on them for livelihood.

² M.V. Shovana Warriar, Women at Work: Migrant Women in the Fish Processing Industry, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Sep. 15, 2001.

The Central Government accepted all the recommendations made by the Murari Committee in 1997. The Minister of Food Processing Industry nominated a small committee from the National Fisheries Action Committee against Foreign Fishing Vessels to oversee the implementation of Murari Committee recommendations. The committee met several times and worked together with the Food Processing Ministry and transferred the Deep Sea Fishing from the Ministry of Food Processing to the Ministry of Animal Husbandry. However, the implementation of the Murari Committee recommendations has since then not been actively pursued.

A more recent effort at the international level is the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention adopted in 2007 prescribing labour standards for the fishing sector. The Work in Fishing Convention 2007 and the Recommendation concerning Work in the Fishing Sector 2007 adopted by the ILO relates to 'commercial fishing' and prescribes work conditions to be formulated and maintained between the 'fishing vessel owner' and the 'fisher'. It also requires member nations to provide social security measures for the fishers. The main objective of this Convention is “to ensure that fishers have decent conditions of work on board fishing vessels with regard to minimum requirements for work on board; conditions of service; accommodation and food; occupational safety and health protection; medical care and social security.”

The standards laid down by the Convention are applicable to both marine and inland fishing, except for subsistence and recreational fishers. The Convention, therefore, may not benefit the vast number of marine and inland fishers in our country, involved in fishing near the shores in seas, rivers, lakes, reservoirs, etc., because most of them are subsistence fishers working in non-mechanised country craft. Most of them are also self-employed and there are hardly any employer-employee relations involved. The Convention is applicable only to fishers on board vessels. According to the National Marine Census of 2005 conducted by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), there are 2.38 lakh (lakh=100,000) marine fishing vessels engaged in fishery; these are mainly classified into three categories: 58,911 (24.67 per cent) mechanised boats, 75,591 (31.66 per cent) motorised craft and 104,270 (43.67 per cent) non-motorised craft.³

Traditional or Artisanal Fishing in India

No clear definition of traditional or artisanal fishing can be offered. Traditional, artisanal or small-scale fisheries now include a range of fishing activities targeting anything from sedentary molluscs in littoral waters to highly migratory tuna stocks in distant waters. It may be an activity that is resident or migrant; occasional, seasonal, part-time or full-time.⁴

“Depending on the context, the definition could be based on:

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ See generally, Sebastian Mathew, Small Scale Fisheries Perspective on an Eco-system based Approach to Fisheries Management, *FAO Fisheries Report*. Issue 658. Supp. pp.7-8, 2002.

- (i) whether or not the fishers are recognized as originating from a fishing caste, community or tribe;
- (ii) whether or not the fishers are known to operate a specific regime of fishing craft or gear, or combination, and if they are at the bottom end of the hierarchy in a particular fishery in a country or province; and
- (iii) whether or not the fishers were traditionally fishing, but not necessarily confined to nearshore or inshore waters.

The definition of what constitutes traditional, artisanal or small-scale could be any one or a combination of these characteristics.”⁵

International and national legal instruments have recognized the importance of small-scale fisheries. Agenda 21 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development of United Nations emphasizes that States should take into account traditional knowledge and the interests of local communities, small-scale artisanal fisheries and indigenous people in the design of fishery development and management programs.⁶ Article 6.18 of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries developed by FAO, 1995 also recommends the protection of the rights of fishers and fish workers, particularly those engaged in subsistence, small-scale and artisanal fisheries so as to provide them with secure and just livelihoods. It also recommends that artisanal fishers be given preferential access to traditional fishing grounds and resources in the waters under their national jurisdiction (FAO, 1995). In India such a measure is already adopted in law by having exclusive zones for artisanal fishing. A national level committee was constituted to oversee the progress of implementation of the Fish Code.

Other legislation that is relevant in applying the Code to Indian fisheries sector are The Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and other Maritime Zones Act, 1976 of India. The Maritime Zones Act, 1976 recognizes the sovereign rights to conservation and management of living resources in the Indian EEZ in addition to their exploration and exploitation. Section 15 (c) further gives power to the Central Government to make rules, *inter alia*, for conservation and management of the living resources of the EEZ and Section 15 (e) for the protection of the marine environment.

During the early half of the 1970’s small scale fishing grew exponentially as it received both technical and marketing support from the Government. Fisheries cooperatives were developed to prevent exploitation of fish workers by middlemen, and to protect fish workers from indebtedness. Support for small-scale fishing gradually reduced with a change in policy when the government actively encouraged development of larger capital investments in industrial and offshore fishing, and redefined their exclusive economic zones to 200 nautical miles. The shift in policy has adversely affected the communities and households in the traditional, artisanal and small scale fishing sector.

Inland Fishing

⁵ *Ibid* pg. 7

⁶ Section 17.74b

The inland fishing sector comprises of a water-spread of about 6.87 million hectares (brackish water- 1.4 million hectares, reservoirs – 1.97 million hectares, tanks and ponds – 2.2 million hectares, oxbow lakes and derelict water – 1.3 million hectares) and 0.16 million km of rivers and canals with immense scope and potential for capture and culture fisheries.⁷ The states of West Bengal, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh produce about 50 per cent of the total inland fish production in the country. Nearly 70% of the 0.71 million fisher workers in India, fish in rivers, reservoirs, lakes and other inland waters.⁸ Additionally, aquaculture farms have been promoted by the Government in several states in the country. While aquaculture tends to be capital intensive, the open water fishing is labour-intensive and provides employment to marginalized sections of society.

The aquaculture industry in India has over the last 15 years transformed itself from a traditional activity to a highly well-developed industry. However, the area covered by shrimp farms in the coastal regulatory zone (CRZ) along the entire coastline has remained almost the same from 1997-98 to 2000-01, as a result of a ban imposed by the Supreme Court of India in December, 1996 for construction of new farms in the CRZ. The ban, permitted shrimp farming only for new farms following traditional cultural practices and implement the directive, the Aquaculture Authority of India was set up.⁹

Laws Impacting Fish Workers in India

Entry 57 of List 1 of Seventh Schedule of the Constitution specifies ‘Fishing and Fisheries beyond Territorial Waters’ as Union Subject, whereas Entry 21 of List II entrusts ‘Fisheries’ to the State governments. Reading both the Entries together, it follows that control and regulation of fishing and fisheries within territorial waters is the exclusive province of the State, whereas beyond the territorial waters, it is the exclusive domain of the Union. Thus, while State jurisdictions over fisheries are limited to 12 nautical miles from the shoreline, the Central Government controls the sea beyond that to 200 nautical miles of EEZ. The 12-mile territorial limits for fisheries are managed under the Marine Fishing Regulation Acts (MFRAs) of the coastal States. Hence matters relating to the fishery sector in respect of inland fishing and marine fishing within the territorial waters is within the purview of the state governments, whereas deep sea marine fishing is directly under the control of the central government.

Under the enabling provisions of the Indian Fisheries Act, 1897, various States and Union Territories have introduced regulations for regulating inland fisheries. The State Governments have through legislation assumed the power to control, regulate, conserve and develop fishing in select waters within the state. These law prohibit the (a) poisoning of waters, (b) throwing of deleterious matters in the waters, (c) fishing in close

⁷ Proceedings of National Conference on ‘Control of Industrial pollution and Environmental Degradation’ available at http://ces.iisc.ernet.in/energy/water/paper/fish1/fish_right_down_int.htm.

⁸ V.V.Sugunan, Reservoir fisheries of India, available at <http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/003/V5930E/V5930E00.htm>.

⁹ Pradeep K. Katiha et. al., Inland Aquaculture in India: Past trend, Present Status and Future Prospects, *Aquaculture Economics and Management*, 9:1, 237-264 available at http://pdfserve.informaworld.com/675614_758077789_725757671.pdf.

time seasons, (d) fishing altogether in certain periods, (d) catching specified species of fish, or of a specified size, (f) use of nets below a certain size, etc.¹⁰ Fishing rights in large water bodies such as rivers and reservoirs are vested in fisheries department, irrigation department, fisheries corporation and those in small water bodies such as tanks and lakes vest in the local bodies such as panchayats. Thus, in most publicly owned water bodies – both large and small, fishing is permitted only after obtaining a lease or licence to fish, from the concerned authority. In granting the lease or licence, the Government has consciously sought to grant preferential rights to cooperative societies of fishermen. Some concessions and priorities are thus accorded to persons belonging to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and to workers cooperatives.

And as stated earlier, for regulation of fisheries in the territorial waters, all the coastal States and the Union Territory of Lakshadweep have enacted their Marine Fishing Regulation Act (MFRA). These Acts are based on a model bill provided by the Union Government in 1979. Interestingly, there is no ministry at the Central level to deal exclusively with the fisheries sector. Currently, the Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, and the Indian Council for Agricultural Research deal with all matters pertaining to fisheries.

State legislations

A list of the state legislations relating to fisheries (both inland and marine) is provided below:

Andhra Pradesh

- Andhra Pradesh Marine Fishing Regulation Act 1994

Andaman and Nicobar Islands

- Andaman and Nicobar Islands Fisheries Regulation, 1938

Goa

- Goa, Daman and Diu Marine Fishing Regulation (Amendment) Act, 1989
- The Goa Marine Fishing Regulation (Relaxation of Time Limit for Registration of Vessels) Act, 1993, Act No. 20 of 1993

Gujarat

- Gujarat Fisheries Act, 2003.
- Gujarat Gulf of Kutch Marine National Park Notification 1982

Karnataka

¹⁰ See, Chhatrapati Singh (ed), *Water Law in India*, Indian Law Institute, New Delhi, 1992.

- Karnataka Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1986

Kerala

- The Kerala Monsoon Fishery (Pelagic) Protection Act 2007
- The Kerala Fishermen Debt Relief Commission Act 2008
- Kerala Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1980

Lakshadweep

- Lakshadweep Marine Fishing Regulation, 2000

Maharashtra

- Maharashtra Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1981

Manipur

- Manipur Fisheries Act, 1988

Mizoram

- Mizoram Fisheries Act, 2005

Orissa

- The Orissa Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1981

Tamil Nadu

- Tamil Nadu Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1983
- Tamil Nadu Fishermen and Labourers engaged in Fishing and Allied Activities (Social Security and Welfare Act), 2007

WestBengal

- West Bengal Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1993
- West Bengal Inland Fisheries Act, 1984

Central Legislation

At the central level, the most important fisheries legislation is the Maritime Zones of India Act, 1981 (Regulation of Fishing by Foreign Vessels). Fisheries within the 12-mile territorial limits are managed under the Marine Fishing Regulation Acts (MFRAs) of the coastal States, to protect the interests of fishers on board traditional fishing vessels.

MFRA was enacted in response to demand from artisanal fishers operating un-powered fishing vessels to protect their fishing space and equipment from bottom trawlers

Another important legislation for regulating the use of coastal areas on the landward side is the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification of 1991. This notification was issued under the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. Today the move to replace the Coastal Zone Regulation with a Coastal Management Zone Authorities is facing stiff opposition from various groups across the country. On May 1 2008, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) issued the draft notification of the Coastal Management Zone (CMZ) 2008 which after going through the two-month process of inviting suggestions and objections could replace the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, 1991, thus diluting the protections accorded by the latter.

The Coastal Aquaculture Authority Act, 2005 sets up a Coastal Aquaculture Authority which will be responsible for regulating and ensuring the sustainable development of coastal aquaculture farms and also other aquaculture activities in the coastal areas. All species of shrimp, prawn, fish or any other aquatic life cultured under controlled conditions (ponds, farm, enclosure or otherwise) in saline or brackish water in the coastal area fall under the jurisdiction of the Coastal Aquaculture Authority Act, 2005. This Act has been critiqued as seeking to reduce livelihood options and permitting damage to the environment paying no heed to the precautionary or polluter pays principles.

International trade has influenced fisheries and aquaculture development in many countries across the globe. As the exports increase, the commercialization of operations has been a logical outcome. The WTO and other Free Trade Agreements would also have a bearing on the future of the fish workers. Fishing has been classified under the Non Agricultural Market Access clause at the WTO – which implies that automobiles and fisheries are included in the same trade clause and treated similarly. Deep tariff cuts are expected to hurt the fishing community. Fisheries are part of on-going sectoral negotiation with the government hoping to achieve zero tariff barriers and decrease Quantitative Restrictions. Recent discussions for the India–EU Trade and Investment Agreement received warnings from the Kerala government. The government stated that such reform in the fisheries sector would affect certain varieties of fish in the region.

Welfare Schemes

Apart from the legislations, the Government has been promoting two welfare programmes for the welfare of traditional fishermen: (i) Group Accident Insurance Scheme for active fishermen, and (ii) Development of Model Fishermen Village. The insurance scheme is a centrally sponsored scheme and gives accident cover for fishermen under the Fisheries Co-operatives. The insurance premium is shared equally between the State and Central Government. Fishermen are insured for Rs. 50,000 in case of death or permanent disability and for Rs. 25,000 in case of partial disability. Another Centrally sponsored scheme is the Development of Model Fishermen Villages, wherein basic amenities such as housing, drinking water and community hall are provided to fishermen. Under this scheme, a fishermen village will consist of not less than 10 houses and the plinth area and cost of construction of house would be limited to 35 Square mts. and Rs.

40,000/- respectively the Central and State government will share the cost of the development equally.

Additionally, the National Federation of Fishermen's Cooperatives Limited (FISHCOPFED) has floated several insurance schemes to benefit the fish workers.

Recent Legislation

More recently, the Tamil Nadu government enacted the 'Tamil Nadu Fishermen and Labourers engaged in Fishing and other Allied Activities (Social Security and Welfare) Act, 2007' to provide for comprehensive social security for fish workers. The Act identifies several categories of workers – 'beach worker', 'boat building yard worker', 'fisherman', 'labourer', 'processing labourer' and 'small scale fish distributor'. The Act provides for registration of workers and provides for social security and welfare of the fishermen and labourers. In order to administer the various welfare benefits, a Board shall be set up. The Welfare Fund set up to fund the various schemes shall have contributions from the fisherman, allied worker, owner of a mechanized fishing vessel, owner of net making plant and fish feed manufacturing unit and the owner of a prawn culture farm or a fish farm. It also imposes a cess (tax) on sale proceeds of dealers; diesel sold by the TN Fisheries Development Corporation Limited, TN Apex Fisheries Cooperative Federation Limited and private diesel bunks approved by the Government; on the lease amount for the lease of reservoirs under the control of TNFDCL; on the lease amount for fishing collected by revenue authorities from Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments, Public works and Forest Departments and local authorities and on primary fishermen cooperatives.

Best Practices Case Study: State of Kerala

The State of Kerala has instituted several progressive measures – both laws and policies. It is important to highlight these as good practices worthy of replication.

The Kerala Fisheries Development and Management Policy of 1993 emphasizes the need to tackle issues of poverty and strengthen livelihood security. The policy highlights the need to reform legislations pertaining to the territorial and inland waters so as to ensure that the rights of ownership of fishing assets rest only with those who fish. It also called for the "right of first sale" to be vested with the fish harvester.

The policy also stresses the need to improve coordination among various government supported institutions, to improve credit availability, to raise the level of skills and productivity of fish workers, to raise the socioeconomic status of those involved in fisheries-related activities, and to enhance the participation of fish workers and women in the management of coastal resources and in the fish economy. Although

this policy initiative was the first of its kind in the country, the policy has yet to be translated into concrete programs of action.¹¹

Another important initiative is the setting up of the Matsyaboard (fishery board). The Matsyaboard in Kerala covers most of the social security benefits prescribed by the ILO Convention 102 on Minimum Standards for Social Security and includes insurance, sickness, maternity and old-age benefits. Although it has no provisions concerning conditions of work, the *Kerala Matsyaboard* legislation is definitely more progressive in terms of providing social security (welfare) measures for the fish workers than the recently adopted ILO Convention, 2007. The Board provides benefits to both men who do the fishing and women involved in marketing fish in the scope of its definition of 'fish workers eligible for benefits'. Though initially the Kerala Matsyaboard did not include workers in allied activities such as peeling and processing and men engaged in fish vending as beneficiaries, they have now been brought under its scope.

The most important feature of the Kerala Matsyaboard legislation is that it provides for mandatory contribution to the Welfare Fund by the traders in the fisheries sector (including the seafood exporters). Initially, this evoked opposition from the seafood exporters who approached the courts and, as a result, the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in *Koluthara Exports* case (2002)¹² refused to extend the categories of those liable to contribute to the fish workers welfare fund to include traders/exporters and exempted such traders/exporters from contributing to the Welfare Fund. To overcome this, the Kerala government promulgated an Ordinance in 2006 which imposed a cess at the rate of half a percent of sale proceeds on dealers and commission agents as contribution to the Kerala Fishermen's Welfare Fund.¹³ The ordinance known as the Kerala Fishermen's and Allied Workers Cess Ordinance, 2006 was replaced by a law in 2007. This law excludes small traders and raises the cess to one percent of sales. The levy is treated as a tax and therefore the money collected would be credited to the consolidated fund of the state which would then be transferred to the welfare fund. The government argued that this move would save the law from the constitutional challenge similar to the one in the *Koluthara* case.¹⁴ This approach of broad basing contribution by the industry obligatory along with the employers to meet the welfare needs of the small producers and workers is an important innovation to protect workers. The Matsyaboard could be used as a model to evolve such legislation as well as be the implementing agency at the national level¹⁵.

Apart from the above, the State of Kerala has enacted the *Kerala Fishermen Debt Relief Commission Act, 2008* to provide relief to fishermen indebted due to natural calamities such as the tsunami, sea erosion and incessant monsoons. The loss of work and loss of equipment has added to their burdens, entrapping them in a cycle of indebtedness.

¹¹ Report on Coastal Fisheries and Poverty: The case of India, *International Collective in Support of Fishworkers*, Chennai, India, 2003.

¹² *Koluthara Exports Ltd. v. State of Kerala & Ors* (2002(2) SCC 459.

¹³ See Nalini Nayak and A.J. Vijayan, *The Coasts, the Fish Resources and the Fishworkers' Movement*, National Human Rights Commission, New Delhi (2006) at p. 45.

¹⁴ See "Fishermen welfare cess Bill passed" *The Hindu*, March 23, 2007 available at <http://www.hindu.com/2007/03/23/stories/2007032303710300.htm>.

¹⁵ See generally, A.V. Vijayan at note 1 above.

The Act seeks to set a Commission for recommending appropriate relief measures to such fishermen and for solving their problems through conciliation, negotiation and adjudication.

The enactment provides a definition of ‘fishing’ and ‘fishermen’ in Section 2. ‘Fishing’ according to Section 2 (xii) means ‘(a) fishing by traditional method or by using traditional or mechanized vessels; (b) sale of sea water/freshwater/saline water dish products by the family members of a fisherman by traveling to various places by two wheelers or by head load, but does not include fishing by using mechanized boat, for which licence has to be taken under Section 6 of the Kerala Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1980 (10 of 1981) and as may be specified by the Government notification.’

Section 2 (xiii) describes a ‘fisherman’ as a ‘person who accept fishing as the foremost means of livelihood and whose annual income does not exceed the annual income limit fixed by the Government from time to time and it includes the widow of a fisherman.’

A fisherman claiming relief under the Act is required to file an application before the commission in the prescribed form. The Commission consisting of a retired high court judge, an expert in fisheries, three representatives of fishermen (all nominated by the government) shall hold sittings in the districts declared as disaster affected areas to hear the applications and (a) reschedule the short term loans to medium term loans and medium to long term loans, or (b) provide necessary facilities for one time settlement of loan falling under the category of non-performing assets, or (c) waive interest or penal interest as per the Reserve Bank of India norms.

Conclusion

The need for a comprehensive legislation for the fish workers has been a long pending demand. The 2007 Work in Fishing Convention and Recommendation of the ILO provide a broad direction for efforts to put together a comprehensive legislation for the sector. Some useful lessons can also be drawn from studying the Kerala experience, especially the debt relief and welfare legislations.