

Fishing in Peripheral villages of OPGC, Banharpali, Odisha

A look into the community and the livelihood



Fishing is one of the primary livelihood activities in the peripheral villages of OPGC's plant in Banharpalli, Odisha. Fishing is done by approximately 200 households and is small scale in nature. The primary source of the activity is the Hirakud reservoir, which covers an extensive area of 725 sq.kms.



These communities are not traditional fishermen but only started fishing since the reservoir came into existence in 1958. Unlike traditional fishing communities with centuries of experience behind them, fishing communities here are new and fresh to the activity.

The catch is mainly meant to satisfy their daily needs and cater to the local market. When compared to Indian average yield of nearly 30kgs/ha for reservoirs, Hirakud reservoir has an average yield of only around 15 kgs/ha. Except for drying, there is no other value addition process in the area. The dried fish produced is entirely consumed within the community



Types of fish include carps, catfish, featherbacks, live fishes and one variety of prawn. It is also interesting to note that after the creation of Hirakud, the number of species in the Mahanaadi basin which drains into the Hirakud has reduced by more than 60%.





The Hirakud reservoir is a large man-made water body created during the construction of the Hirakud dam. It serves as a primary source of water and fisheries in hundreds of villages along its shores.





Arashti is the FIG leader for fishermen in Baragada village. According to him, there are usually 5-10 households in each village engaged in fishing. On an average, a family can make Rs.3000-Rs.5000 per month depending on the catch.





Fishermen usually work solo or in teams of two. Nets are laid in the early hours of the evening (3pm-7pm) and the catch is collected during the early morning. Certain fishermen also do the vice versa.





There are several varieties of fish that are caught in a single catch. It may vary from large to small species, with the latter being more costly. The quantity of the catch can vary from 2-3 kgs to 15 kgs per day depending on the season. 



Majority of the fishermen use wooden non-mechanical boats. These boats usually cost between Rs.7000 – Rs.20,000 depending on their size and the quality of wood used.





Fishermen weave their own nets after buying the raw material from towns like Sambalpur. A kilo of net weaving thread costs between Rs.400 to Rs.900.





Several traders procure the catch in the morning from the fishermen as soon as the boat arrives on the shore. These traders loan the fishermen money to buy boats and nets and in turn procure fish at low rates for an agreed period of time. A good number of fishermen remain indebted this way.





These traders mostly have their own outlet in the markets where they themselves clean and sell the fish. Majority of the catch is sold in the local markets in Banaharpali, Bandbahal etc. and only when there is surplus the fish is sent to external markets.





There are local fish markets in almost every village. The market operates during the mornings. Traders and fishermen also sell their produce in kissan mandi which operates only once a week at Banaharpali.





There is hardly any value addition process to the catch in the entire area. All of the fish is mainly sold raw. Dry smoked fish is the only value added product produced in the area.

The fish are smoked on charcoal or firewood and sun dried for 2-3 days till the desired dryness and quality are achieved. The fishermen directly sell dry fish in the kissan mandi (farmer's market) or at their homes.





Apart from the Hirakud reservoir, the landscape in the area is dotted with a numerous number of small ponds, lakes and other water bodies. These resources are currently unexploited and can be of significant use if activities like Pisciculture and Aquaculture are initiated.





A fisherman arriving with his catch in the morning at Chadarama village

Dry fish being smoked on firewood





Raw material used in weaving nets. The primary market for this is Sambalpur town

A woman selling dry fish at the kissan mandi





The End