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QUALITY OF LIFE OF FISHERFOLK IN KERALA: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BEYPORE, KOZHIKODE

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ABSTRACT

Fisher folk communities constitute a vital segment of coastal economies, particularly in regions like Kerala where marine resources play a crucial role in livelihoods. Despite their economic importance, fisher folk are often categorized among marginalized communities due to persistent socio-economic challenges. This study examines the quality of life (QoL) of fisher folk in Beypore, Kozhikode, by comparing it with the general population. Using both primary and secondary data, a composite Quality of Life Index (QLI) was constructed based on indicators such as standard of living, consumption expenditure, financial constraints, education, health, and occupation. The findings reveal significant disparities between fisherfolk and the general population, with fisherfolk scoring lower across most dimensions. The study highlights the need for targeted policy interventions to enhance living standards, ensure financial inclusion, and promote sustainable livelihoods.

KEYWORDS: *Fisherfolk, Quality of Life, Kerala, Beypore, Socio-economic conditions, Livelihood*

1. INTRODUCTION

Fisherfolk communities play a significant role in the socio-economic framework of coastal regions, particularly in developing countries. However, fisherfolk communities often remain economically and socially vulnerable due to environmental uncertainties, fluctuating incomes, and limited access to resources.

The fisheries sector in India is a significant contributor to employment, food security, and economic development, supporting over 14 million people (CMFRI, Marine Fisheries Census Government of India, Kochi, 2005). Since independence, fish production has increased more than tenfold, with substantial growth driven by technological advancements, aquaculture expansion, and policy support. India's vast resource base—including an 8,118 km coastline, numerous fishing villages, and extensive inland water systems—provides strong potential for fisheries development. However, despite this progress, issues such as low productivity, regional disparities, and socio-economic challenges among traditional fishing communities persist.

Kerala occupies a prominent position in India's fisheries sector, contributing about 20 percent of the country's marine fish landings. With a coastline of 590 km and rich inland water resources, fishing is deeply embedded in the socio-economic and cultural life of the state. The sector has undergone modernization through mechanized fishing crafts, synthetic gear, and advanced navigation technologies such as GPS and echo sounders. Infrastructure development—including processing units, cold storage facilities, and export networks—has further strengthened the industry. Nevertheless, these advancements have also widened the gap between mechanized and traditional fishermen, leading to inequalities within the sector.

Within Kerala, Kozhikode district is an important fisheries region, comprising 35 fishing villages, 19 landing centers, and a fisherfolk population exceeding 82,000 (CMFRI, Marine Fisheries Census Government of India, Kochi, 2005). Beypore, a coastal locality in Kozhikode, stands out as a historically significant and economically active fishing hub. Known for its maritime heritage and traditional shipbuilding, Beypore today functions as a major fish landing and distribution center supporting a wide range of livelihoods.

The fisheries sector in Beypore is characterized by a dual structure, where traditional small-scale fishing coexists with mechanized operations. A large proportion of the population depends directly or indirectly on fisheries,

including activities such as fish processing, vending, net making, and transportation. Women play a crucial role in post-harvest activities, contributing significantly to household income and local markets.

Despite its importance, the fishing community in Beypore faces several challenges. These include declining fish catch due to overfishing and environmental changes, income instability, rising operational costs, and limited access to modern technology for traditional fishermen. In addition, poor living conditions, occupational health risks, and dependence on intermediaries for marketing further affect their socio-economic well-being.

Thus, Beypore represents a typical coastal fishing community where economic potential coexists with vulnerability. While the fisheries sector continues to grow, the benefits are unevenly distributed, particularly among traditional fisherfolk. Studying Beypore provides valuable insights into the quality of life, livelihood challenges, and sustainability issues faced by coastal communities, emphasizing the need for inclusive and sustainable fisheries development policies.

The present study aims to assess the quality of life of fisherfolk in Beypore and compare it with the general population, thereby identifying disparities and suggesting measures for improvement.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous studies have consistently highlighted the socio-economic vulnerabilities of fisherfolk communities. Nammalwar and Prakasam (1979) emphasized that overfishing and lack of technological access contribute to economic instability among fishermen. Fernando (1981) stressed the importance of infrastructure such as cold storage, transportation, and sanitation for improving living conditions. Kurien (1981) identified inequality in asset ownership and exploitation by intermediaries as major causes of poverty among fishermen. Similarly, Kalawar (1981) observed poor living conditions and high indebtedness in coastal communities. Subba Rao (1983) and Sehara et al. (1983) analyzed the impact of mechanization, noting improvements in income but also increased inequality. Ibrahim (1992) found that mechanization sometimes reduced employment opportunities for traditional fishermen. Recent studies (Macfadyen & Corcoran, 2002; Mishra, 2008; Ganesh Kumar, 2010) highlight the need for integrated approaches such as the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) to address poverty and improve living conditions. Abid Husain, Rauf E, (2024) Fishermen in Indian coastal areas is at a high risk of stress with its consequences on both physical and mental health.

Overall, the literature indicates that fisherfolk communities face persistent socio-economic challenges despite technological and policy advancements.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 40 fisherfolk households and 40 households from the general population in Beypore, using purposive sampling. In addition to questionnaires, interviews and field observations were conducted to assess living conditions, infrastructure, and overall socio-economic status. Secondary data were obtained from Census reports, Kerala Fisheries Department statistics, municipal records, and relevant academic literature.

To measure the overall well-being of the respondents, a composite Quality of Life Index (QLI) was constructed. The index comprises several key indicators, including the Standard of Living Index (SLI), Consumption Expenditure Index (CEI), Financial Constraint Index (FCI), Health Index (HI), Educational Attainment Index (EAI), Occupational Index (OI), and Other Measures Index (OMI). For each of these components, maximum and minimum values were fixed, and the overall QLI was calculated as the average of all components.

Thus, the Quality of Life Index is expressed as:
QLI = (SLI + CEI + FCI + HI + EAI + OI + OMI) / 7.
Statistical tools such as percentages, ratios, and comparative analysis were used to interpret the data.

4. RESULTS

The results of the study indicate that the general population has a higher Quality of Life Index (0.626) compared to the fisherfolk population (0.405), highlighting significant disparities between the two groups.

A component-wise analysis further reveals that the general population performs better in several dimensions. The Standard of Living Index is significantly higher for the general population (0.808) compared to fisherfolk (0.427). Similarly, consumption expenditure is higher among the general population, reflecting better income and

purchasing capacity. In terms of financial constraints, fisherfolk experience greater financial insecurity and indebtedness. Educational attainment is also lower among fisherfolk, limiting their opportunities for upward mobility. Although both groups face health-related challenges, the health index for fisherfolk is slightly higher than that of the general population, though access to healthcare services remains inadequate. Occupational opportunities are more limited for fisherfolk, as they largely depend on traditional fishing activities with minimal diversification.

The inequality in quality of life between the two groups is further demonstrated through the Ratio of Quality of Life Index (RQLI), which is calculated as :

RQLI = 0.626 / 0.405 = 1.545

This indicates that the general population enjoys a quality of life approximately 1.5 times higher than that of the fisherfolk community. The ratio clearly highlights the presence of significant socio-economic inequality and underscores the need for targeted interventions to improve the living conditions of fisherfolk communities.

KEY FINDINGS

The study reveals that fisherfolk communities experience a comparatively lower standard of living and income levels than the general population. Financial insecurity remains a major concern, with many households facing indebtedness and limited savings. Educational attainment among fisherfolk is relatively low, which further restricts access to better employment opportunities. Occupational diversification is minimal, as most individuals continue to depend on traditional fishing activities for their livelihood. Although health conditions are moderate, access to adequate healthcare services remains insufficient. Overall, the continued dependence on traditional livelihoods, combined with socio-economic constraints, limits the overall development and well-being of fisherfolk communities.

CONCLUSION

The study clearly highlights the disparity in the quality of life between fisherfolk and the general population in Beypore. Despite some improvements due to development initiatives, fisherfolk communities continue to face structural disadvantages in terms of income, education, employment opportunities, and infrastructure. The Quality of Life Index (QLI) and its comparative ratio further confirm the presence of significant inequality. These findings emphasize the urgent need for inclusive and targeted development policies. Addressing these disparities is crucial not only for achieving social equity but also for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the fisheries sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve the quality of life of fisherfolk communities, it is essential to strengthen government welfare schemes and ensure their effective implementation. Infrastructure development, including better roads, storage facilities, and market access, should be prioritized to support economic activities. Promoting alternative livelihoods such as aquaculture and tourism can reduce overdependence on traditional fishing and enhance income stability. Financial inclusion should be improved by expanding access to banking services, credit facilities, and insurance coverage. Additionally, improving access to education and healthcare services is vital for long-term development. Encouraging cooperative movements and community participation can further empower fisherfolk communities and promote sustainable and inclusive growth.

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