

RECORD NOTE OF THE MEETING OF THE SUB-GROUP OF THE STATE DEVELOPMENT REFORMS COMMISSION ON FISHERIES HELD ON THE 17TH AUGUST, 2007 IN THE OFFICE CHAMBER OF SHRI E.K. MAWLONG, CHAIRMAN, STATE DEVELOPMENT REFORMS COMMISSION, AT 11:00 A.M.

The Meeting was chaired by Shri Skylance G. Momin, Vice Chairman, State Development Reforms Commission.

The list of Members and Officers who attended the Meeting is at Annexure – I.

At the outset, the Chairman welcomed the members of the Sub-Group and also the Officials of Fisheries Department who attended this first Meeting of the Sub-Group. He also informed the Meeting that the Sub-Group was formed to discuss the problems of fish farmers and to suggest urgent measures that can be taken up to improve the lot of fish farmers in the State and also the functioning and delivery mechanism of the Fisheries Department.

Points of discussions taken up in the Meeting:

1. Initiating the discussions the Chairman informed that according to his knowledge, only 20 % of the total fish requirement in the State is met from local production while 80 % is being brought from outside like Andhra Pradesh and other States. Therefore, there is a great need and scope to increase fish production in the State.

Coming to the problems of fish farmers in the State and the problems being faced by the Department, the Meeting discussed at length on the following points:

(i) **Supply of fish seeds:** Supply of fish seeds by the Department is not encouraging especially in Garo Hills where many individual fish farmers could not get sufficient supply of good quality seeds, and even when seeds are available in Departmental hatcheries, people from far off places could not avail of the facility due to the distance and expenditure involved. From his own experience, the Chairman informed that once he had applied for 10,000 fish seeds from the Department but received only 300 seeds in the first instance and another 2000 seeds the second time. Non-availability of fish seeds has compelled the farmers to purchase seeds from local vendors, who went round from village to village to sell fish seeds at comparatively higher prices which result in an increase in total input costs.

The Department informed that at present the total requirement of fish seeds in the State is being met from other States of the North Eastern Region. To meet the increasing demand of fish seeds, setting of Eco-hatchery in all the 7 (seven) Districts both in Government and private sector farmers and up-gradation of all Departmental Farms would be one of the measures to overcome the problems faced by the farmers.

The Director of Fisheries admitted that the Department is facing problems in this respect as at present as the number of hatcheries is not sufficient to meet the total demand of individual fish farmers in the State. She also informed the Meeting that the fish seeds being sold by local vendors are usually of inferior quality thereby affecting the total quantity of fish produced in the State. This problem can be solved only by increasing the numbers of departmental hatchery tanks and also by encouraging individual fish farmers to construct private hatcheries. The Chairman suggested that the fish seeds should be made available by the Department at Block headquarters, so that people from the villages could easily procure quality seeds instead of purchasing inferior quality seeds from the local vendors.

(ii) **Growth of Fisheries in the State:** The Chairman expressed his concern that the growth of fisheries in the State is not encouraging. There are many places in the State where no fish ponds/tanks exist. In some places, fish ponds exist in paper only. But the fact is that there are many places where there is tremendous scope to construct/develop fisheries, especially in Garo Hills where the nokmas are willing to donate land for the purpose. For example, in Bolbogre, the Nokma has offered 8 bighas of land for development of fisheries. In Khalupara, the Chairman had released 10,000 fingerlings in 4 ponds from his own pocket, where villagers are permitted to catch fishes from Ponds No. 1, 2 & 4 but not from Pond No. 3. and harvest of fishes from these ponds was very encouraging. In reply to a question by the Chairman regarding the exact numbers of fish ponds dug under NREGS, the Director replied that no records are available with the Directorate as a number of ponds came up with assistance from other departments like Community & Rural Development, Agriculture, Soil Conservation, etc. The Directorate is having only the records of those ponds availing financial assistance from the Fisheries Department. The Chairman wanted that all records pertaining to the exact number of fish ponds dug under NREGS be collected by the Department from all Deputy Commissioners and B.D.Os. The Director informed that

with the implementation of the Scheme “10,000 Ponds” in the State, the targeted growth of fisheries in the State is expected to be achieved. During 2006-07, 400 fish ponds have been constructed under the Scheme. The Chairman informed the Meeting that many people are not aware of the benefits of fish farming. Giving an example, he said by cultivating paddy in 1 bigha of land a person can earn at least Rs. 2000/- annually, while a fish pond with the same water area can produce fishes worth Rs. 60,000/- annually, with less labour involved. Therefore, people should be made aware of this fact, for the growth of fish farming in the State.

The Fishery Project at Jamge came up for discussion in the Meeting. The Director informed that although the Project sponsored under NEC Scheme was completed some time back, it was not operational due to some defects in the construction works. Measures to rectify the defects have been taken up and the Project is expected to be fully operational soon.

(iii) **Feeds and production of Fishes:** The Meeting was informed by the Director that there are no feed mills in the State for supply of scientifically prescribed feeds to farmers. As such farmers have to depend mostly on traditional/indigenous feeds which are easily available locally, e.g. cow dung, tree-bark, ants, insects, etc. Chairman asked the Department to direct the Superintendent of Fisheries to submit a report on local feeds being used by fish farmers in the State so that poor quality of fish foods should not effect the production of fish.

Another problem affecting fish production in the State is the inability of fish farmers to counter rampant killing of fishes by snakes, and other fish eating creatures. It was suggested in the Meeting that torn nets may be used to trap the snakes as being practised in Ri-Bhoi District, and also rearing of ducks may be encouraged to protect fishes from snakes, etc. Other traditional methods to counter the problem of rampant killing of fishes may be propagated, so that production of fish is not adversely affected.

In reply to a question from the Chairman regarding annual fish production and demand in the State, the Director informed that the State produces 5000 M.T. annually, while the total demand for fish in the State is between 11,000 to 12,000 M.T. annually. The

Secretary, Fishery Department suggested that a survey be conducted by the Department to know the exact total water area being utilised for fish farming and also the potential annual total fish production in the State.

(iv) **Marketing/Post Harvest management** : Fish is a quickly perishable commodity. Hence, post harvest management is an essential part of pisciculture to prevent spoilage and wastage. The crop harvested is to be either sold off or preserved.

To counter the problems enumerated above and to assist the farmers the following measures would have to be taken up.

Setting up of Ice-Plant : Four nos of Ice-Plants to be set up in each District supported by selling booths, etc.

(v) **Awareness Programmes and Trainings** : It was discussed in the meeting that one of the main problems being faced by fish farmers in the State is their lack of awareness of scientific methods of fish farming. Therefore, crash courses, awareness programmes and trainings are most essential in order to make the people aware of the scientific methods of fish farming. The Director informed the Meeting that short term trainings are being imparted to selected fish farmers of the States and some of them have also been taken on exposure trips outside the State. However, due to shortage of fund, all farmers could not be covered but only a few of them had benefited. The Meeting felt that to overcome this problem, at least 1 (one) Fishery Training Institute for the State should be set up for imparting training to fish farmers of the State in batches.

(vi) **Organisational and other problems faced by the Department:** The Director informed the Meeting that the shortage of staff in the Department has greatly hampered the implementation of schemes in the State. In the Directorate, except for the post of Deputy Director which at present is lying vacant, there is no intermediary post of Joint Director.

(a) Directorate level : The Director further informed that she is assisted only by the Deputy Director. The Department requires to be further strengthened in terms of technical manpower.

- (b) District level : The Director informed that the Superintendent of Fisheries is assisted by Fishery Officers, Fishery Demonstrators and Fishery Supervisors.
- (c) Sub-Divisional level : The Director of Fisheries informed that the Fishery Officer is assisted by Fishery Supervisors and Fishery Demonstrators. The Department also proposed that the Fishery Officer be given Gazetted status.

The above-mentioned problems which have adversely affected the work programmes of the Department should be tackled on a war-footing during this year of the farmers. There is a Fish Farmers' Development Agency (FFDA) at the State Level to monitor development of Fisheries in the State. However, the Chairman of the Agency did not have any supporting staff except for 1 (one) U.D. Assistant. The post of Deputy Director was created on condition that the post of Assistant Director be transferred to Tura to look after the development of fisheries in Garo Hills. However, the Assistant Director also did not have any supporting staff, except for the post of Driver with no vehicle and no infrastructure, thus rendering the post non-functional. At the District Level, vacant posts of Fishery Officers and Fishery Demonstrators are badly needed to be filled up for the smooth functioning of the Department, and also a few more posts of fishery officer and demonstrator are required to be created to strengthen the Department. Another fact brought up in the Meeting was that, the Fishery Officers incharge of Sub-Divisions are of non-gazetted rank and so are unable to function as other Sub-divisional heads. The Chairman suggested that the post of Fishery Officer may be made a gazetted post in order to boost their morale and make them more effective in their jobs. In the Block level, a minimum of 2 (two) Fishery Demonstrators are needed for each and every Community & Rural Development Block. However, this also could not be implemented due to paucity of fund. At present in 8 Community & Rural Development Blocks in Garo Hills only 5 Fishery Demonstrators are in position and some of them are overburdened as they have to cover 2 Blocks at a time. The Meeting stressed the need to (a) revamp and restructure the Department as a whole so that it can function more effectively, (b) strengthen the organisational setup of the Department by filling up the vacant posts and also by creating more posts at the Directorate, District, Sub-divisional and Block levels, (c) provide sufficient fund for the Department for more effective and successful implementation of different schemes in the State for the benefits of the people of the State as a whole and the fish farmers in particular.

To a final question from the Chairman, as to when the State is expected to be self sufficient in fish production, the Director stated that this can be expected in about 5 years' time.

The Meeting ended with a vote of thanks from the Chair.

(S.G.Momin)
Vice Chairman,
State Development Reforms Commission.

ANNEXURE – I

List of Members/Officers present in the Meeting of the Sub-Group of the State Development Reforms Commission on Fisheries held on 17.08.2007 in the Office Chamber of Shri E.K. Mawlong, Chairman, State Development Reforms Commission at 11:00 A.M.

Sl. No.	<u>Name and Designation</u>
1.	Shri Skylance G. Momin, Vice-Chairman, SDRC
2.	Shri M.D. Sangma, Member, SDRC
3.	Smti. M.H.K. Marak, Secretary to the Govt. of Meghalaya, Fisheries Department
4.	Smti. C.T. Sangma, Director of Fisheries.
5.	Shri A.F. Syiem, F.I.O. (Fisheries Department)
6.	Shri S. Lyngdoh, Deputy Director, Programme Implementation & Evaluation

Copy for kind information and necessary action to :-

1. Shri Skylance G. Momin, Vice-Chairman, State Development Reforms Commission.
2. Shri M.D. Sangma, Member, SDRC
3. Smti. Sophia R. Marak, Member, SDRC..
4. Shri P. Kharkongor, IAS, Commissioner & Secretary to the Govt. of Meghalaya, Fisheries Department.
5. Smti. M.H.K. Marak, Secretary to the Govt. of Meghalaya, Fisheries Department.
6. Smti. C.T. Sangma, Director of Fisheries near Fish Dale, Meghalaya Shillong.
7. Shri A.F. Syiem, F.I.O. (Fisheries Department) near Fish Dale, Meghalaya Shillong.
8. Shri S. Lyngdoh, Deputy Director, Programme Implementation & Evaluation, Meghalaya Shillong.

(W.Synrem)
Officer on Special Duty to the Govt. of Meghalaya,
Programme Implementation & Evaluation Department
& Member Secretary, State Development Reforms Commission.