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Fisheries: Fostering Economy through Employment & Entrepreneurship

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Recognized as a 'Sunrise Sector', this primary sector has a vital contribution in country's national income and exports besides ensuring food and nutritional security. Fish production in India has witnessed a tremendous growth by showcasing a production increase from 7.5 Lakhs MT during 1950-51 to the current production of 141 Lakhs MT. About 28 million peoples mostly marginalized and vulnerable are being supported by this sector. In the year 2021-22, this sector witnessed a double digit average annual growth rate of over 10%. Presently, India is the 3rd largest fish producing and 2nd largest aquaculture nation in the world after China accounting for 8% of global production and around 7% of agricultural Gross Value Added (GVA). The sector is posed to and has all the potential to play a significant role in the economy of the country. Indian fisheries have witnessed a paradigm shift from marine dominated fisheries to inland fisheries. The contribution of inland fisheries in total fish production in the country has almost doubled in the last four to five decades from 36% in mid 1980s to 70 percent in the recent past. Further within inland fisheries, a shift from capture to culture-based fisheries has paved the way for sustained blue economy.

Consumption and Export Potential: A recent study conducted by National Council for Applied Economics Research (NCAER) through an extensive primary survey across twenty-four major states of India came out with very useful statistics. Overall, Indian households consume around 5 kg of fish per month, approximately around 60 kg per year. India is among the top 5 fish exporting countries in the world. In 2022 the overall household monthly consumption expenditure on fish as a proportion to total food expenditure has increased to 16.8 per cent compared to a 7.6 per cent share in 2011-12 as per the NSS survey (68th round). The monthly consumption of fish has also shown a significant increase during the same period though the increase in demand for fish in the urban areas has outpaced the demand in rural areas. About 17% of India's agricultural exports are fish and fish products. In 2021-22, the country exported marine products of quantity 1.36 million MT. The value of exports for the same year was US\$ 7.76 billion. It is the best and cheapest source of animal protein.

Potential of Fisheries in India: India is endowed with rich freshwater, brackish water and marine resources. Besides its coastline of 8,118 km, and continental shelf



of 0.42 million sq. km., India possesses vast inland aquatic resources in the form of 195,210 km of rivers and canal, 2.9 million ha of reservoirs, 2.41 million ha of ponds and tanks, 1.07 million ha of beels, oxbow lakes and derelict waters and 1.24 million ha of brackish water area. The river system of the country comprises 14 major rivers (catchments > 20,000 sq. km.), 44 medium rivers (catchments 2,000-20,000 sq. km.) and innumerable small rivers and desert streams. The floodplain lakes are primarily continuum of rivers Ganga and Brahmaputra. These are in the form of oxbow lakes (Mauns, Chauras, Jheels and Beels as they are called locally), especially in Assam, Manipur, West Bengal, Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Present status of Fish Production: Until 2000, marine fish production dominated India's total fish production. However, due to promotion and adoption of scientific rearing and management practices of fish production, the Inland fisheries in India have seen a turnaround and presently contribute to about 70% of total fish production. Therefore, through the holistic approach adopted under PMMSY, inland fisheries offer immense opportunity and potential to enhance production through optimal utilization of fisheries, technology infusion and capacity building. In Inland aquaculture, in Tanks and Ponds culture-based fishery is predominant and contributes to the maximum share (8.5 million MT) in total fish production. As a major contributor towards production, the Department has prioritized to expand the horizontal area under tanks and ponds to achieve a target production of 13.5 lakhs MT. Brackish/Saline water aquaculture have also gained a great momentum in India. India's export growth story is primarily due to the success of brackish

water aquaculture of shrimp. The last few decades have witnessed significant growth in brackish water shrimp aquaculture; production of farmed shrimp has risen from about 20 MT in 1970 to 7.47 Lakh MT in 2020, thereby contributing to major export share of the INR 46,662 crores fisheries export earnings. Brackish water aquaculture offers huge potential as the country has around 1.42 million ha of brackish/saline area, of which only around 13% is utilized. With the aim to harness its potential, the Department has focused on increasing current fish production of 0.7 million MT to 1.10 million MT by FY 2024-25.

The country is also bestowed with vast and varied cold water resources with valuable indigenous fish germplasm and pristine water with a range of thermal regimes. Hence the Himalayan states offer a unique value proposition in Cold Water Fisheries. The current cold water fish production stands at 52,084 MT and current productivity is about 1 ton/ha. Similarly, the Ornamental fisheries also come with a huge export potential, it is a multibillion industry spread across more than 125 countries with trade at retail level worth US \$10 billion. The Cage Culture in Reservoirs offers yet another promising opportunity to augment fish production in the country and to generate employment opportunities for unemployed youth. Reservoirs are generally referred to as '*sleeping giants*' as in spite of large area covered under it, their contribution stands at only 3.81% of the total inland fish production\

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY): The high returns along with the entrepreneurial and employment opportunities present in this sector and the focus on healthy diet especially after the COVID-19 is witnessing an increase in the



demand for fish and fish products both at national as well as international level. The government of the country has also come up with a prestigious scheme Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY). The yojana is implemented by the Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandary and Dairying.

The scheme aims to harness the potential of fisheries sector in a sustainable, responsible, inclusive and equitable manner. It focuses on enhancing fish production and productivity through expansion, intensification, diversification and productive utilization of land and water. The scheme also stresses on modernization and strengthening of the value chain including post-harvest management and quality improvement with the ultimate aim of doubling fishers and fish farmers' income and generate meaningful employment. The target under the scheme is to enhance the fish production in the country to 22 million metric tonnes by 2024-25 from the production of 13.75 million metric tonnes in 2018-19 and enhance aquaculture productivity from the current national average of 3 tons to 5 tons per hectare. The scheme also aims to increase domestic fish consumption from 5 g to 12 kg per capita.

Conclusion:

A unified approach is needed to develop this sector and to realize its full potential. The sector faces numerous challenges. The fisheries sector critically lacks a temperature-controlled supply chain. Moreover, marketing of fish & its products is mostly unorganized and unregulated. The PMMSY carries many provisions like improved infrastructure and supply chain management, support for value addition and processing, mobilization of fishermen

and credit support for their economic empowerment, timely and relevant knowledge through Matsya Seva Kendras'. One can hope that with the renewed support and the exclusive focus on this sunrise sector, the fishery can become a crucial substitute for commonly used animal protein and competitive with other alternatives for nutritional security and income and employment generation ultimately leading to equitable and inclusive growth.