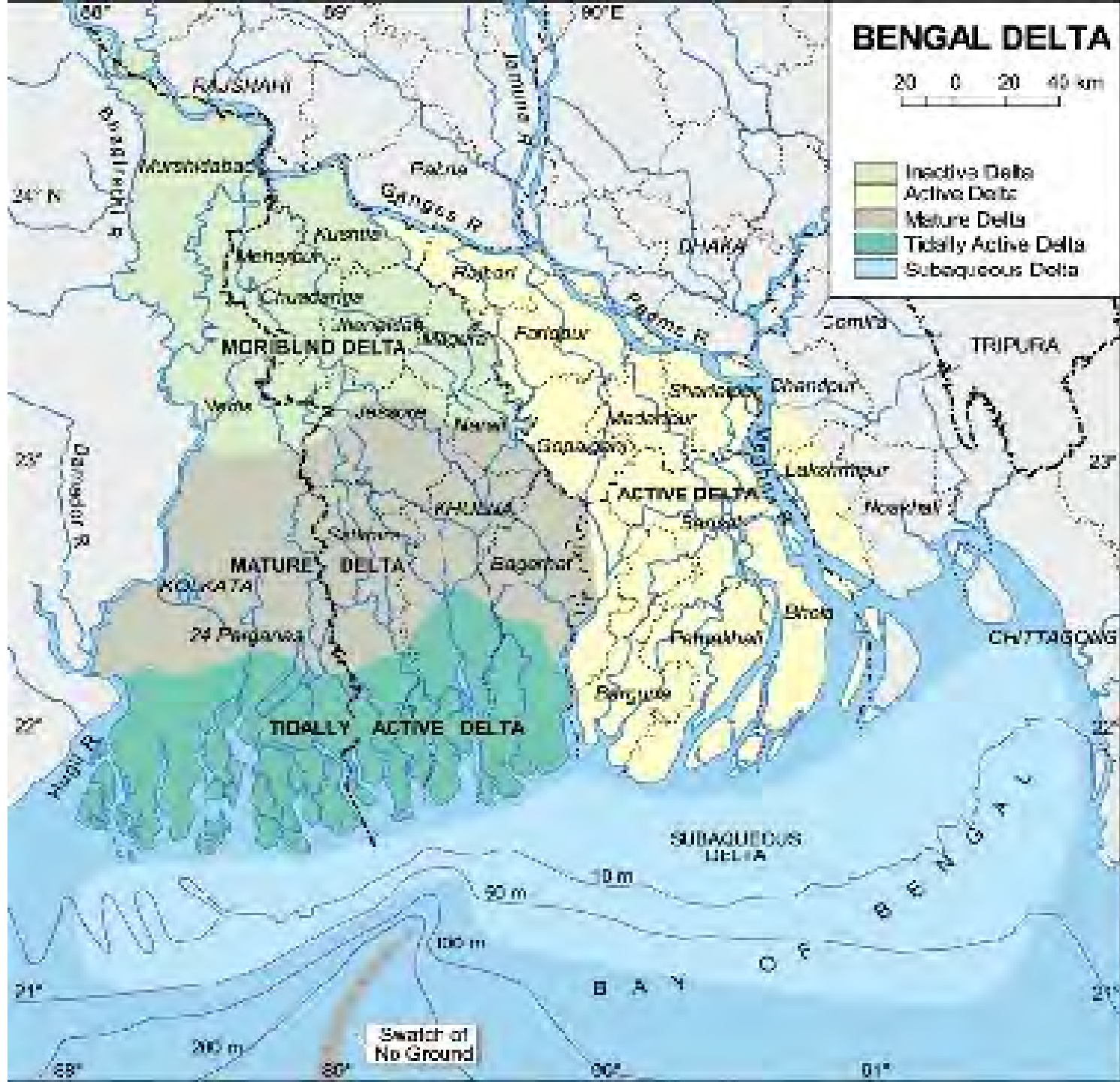


FISHER WOMEN OF THE SUNDERBAN ARE CHANGING THE FINANCIAL LANDSCAPE.

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West Bengal has a short coastline approximately. 158 Kms. Excluding Hooghly Matla Estuary. Coastline is spread over tow districts of south 24-Parganas and Purba-Medinipur. The State has 777 Sq. Kms inshore area (up to 10 Fathoms) 1813 Sq.km offshore area (above 10 to 40 fathoms), 17049 Sq. km continental shelf (above 40 to 100 fathoms). For marine capture fishing in the Bay of Bengal.





Woman Fisher

- Women suffer from psychological tensions because of overflowing of their villages by tidal water and flood from time to time.
- They often lose part of their hands and feet being bitten away by a group of aquatic animals locally termed as *"Kamot"*.
- As they spent most of the time in water they are affected by different skin diseases.
- Dropping out of school by the children is increasing as their families are more interested in putting them in different fishing occupations which fetch them ready hand money.
- Job satisfaction : Very little data is available regarding job satisfaction of women, who are involved in different fishing activities and survey regarding this has not been carried out.
- The common/poor people have no access to legal empowerment, legal aid etc. they have to depend on poor traditional justice system.

Why the Sundarbans?

- ❑ World's largest delta and estuarine forest ecosystem.
- ❑ The marine, freshwater and forest ecosystems provide a unique mix of habitats for wildlife and biodiversity.
- ❑ Productive and protective layer along the coast, playing a crucial ecological and economic role for local communities and urban centres.

For most of the people Sunderbans and Forest with Royal bengal Tiger are synonymous.

And not many people know that millions of people live in this hinterland where the rivers flows from south to north for half the day and from north to south for rest of the day. It is a land of creeks and canals, it is estuary, it is wetland.

Most of the flora & fauna are either aquatic or semi-aquatic origin. Where the pollution indicator species is 'illish mach'(hilsha sp.).



- This area is constantly subjected to natural disasters. Storms, severe cyclones and floods are a regular feature. Poor communication facilities, inadequate access to markets and credit, inadequate educational facilities and poor health infrastructure dominated in the area. Though there are co-operatives, local money lenders have basically kept many people in virtual economic bondage.
- Overall literacy rate is very low at about 52.3% (male 66.6%, female 36.9%). Data reveal that only 26% families use some form family planning methods. The average family size is 6-8. Family planning methods accessibility and understanding are found more among those who live closer to Kolkata.



- About 47% of the cultivating household do not have any irrigation facilities and thus practice a seasonal double mono-cropping system, locally known as Khariff. The population composition revealed the majority belong to SC (59%). About 5% are member of the ST population. About 13.5% of the population are migrant having immigration from Bangladesh.
- Family income data reveal that the majority (44.1%) earn between Rs. 1000-2000/ per month and about 29% each, even less than Rs. 1000/- per month. Only about 26% earn more than Rs. 2000/- per month.

The women fish workers in Sunderban areas are facing some problems in their sectoral participation which are as follows:



Social

- **Always in a state of insecurity feelings / Psychofearness about abrupt natural calamity**
- **Dowry system and low age marriage.**
- **Low educational attainment. Number of school drop out are increasing day by day for the attraction of cash money of seed collection seed collection**
- **Lack of medical facilities / dependence on witch doctor**
- **Drug addiction male partner**
- **Polygamy of husband**
- **Lack of recreation due to poor power & communication system**
- **Traditional values and culture are now endangered**
-



Economical

- **Number of seed collector are increasing due to its high demand**
- **Fish population and biodiversity is decreasing near the shore of Bay of Bengal**
- **Limited fish marketing facilities.**
- **Limited fish trading activities. (due to less mobile).**
- **Non availability of quality input and food.**
- **Fair price marketing facilities are not available due to the dominant role of 'FARIA' (Middleman)**
- **Lack of credit facilities. Seed collectors are being deprived from financial assistance in the form of bank loan and Govt. subsidy**



Technological

- **Poor technological knowledge about harvesting post harvesting and preservation of fish**
- **Lack of knowledge about locally available nutrient and herbs**
- **Lack of knowledge about primary and reproductive health care.**
- **Poor support of technology extension system.**
- **Lack of awareness regarding women right.**



Health



- **Skin Disease**
- **Anemia**
- **Gastric problem**
- **Worm infestation**
- **Snake bite**
- **Psychological disbalanced – prone to suicide (no. of cases have been recorded)**
- **Different sexually transmitted disease due to polygamy of husband**

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Status of Women involvement in the Aquaculture sector of Sunderban.

- Many Women SHG are now involved in ornamental fish culture both rearing and breeding
- They are also involved in integrated Fishery .
- They are also involved in product development like dry fish, fish papad, fish pickle etc.
- They are working in Benfish (Apex body of Fisheries co-operative society, govt of W.B) mobile van
- They are also involved as labour in Fish processing industries.
- Their major occupation is still seed collection from the coast

Post larvae tiger prawn seed collection



Along the coast (South)



By-catch (South)



In the creeks (South)



In the river (North)



Why Fisher Women are Few Number in Extension Programme

- **Directorate of Fisheries organizes training to a large number of fisher women on several fishery related subject (like net making etc.) every year. During a study on whether women in fishing profession would like to take a training programme, they reply with certain constraints, which are listed below :**
- **1. Nobody to look after their children**
- **2. Lack of time.**
- **3. Husbands/mother in law may not allow their participation in training programmes.**
- **4. Training centres are too far from their residence.**
- **5. After completion of training, getting loan is very difficult.**
- **6. Lack of confidence/self-estimation.**



Ornamental Fishery Scenario



- West Bengal state is pioneer in ornamental fish culture in India.
- West Bengal is no. 1 in Export and in Domestic market
- Highest in human resource exploitation. 20 to 30 thousand women fishers are involved
- Highest no. of Women's Co-operative societies and Self Help Groups on ornamental fish culture are running successfully in the state – a unique step in our country.

Aquarium Fishery is a sun rise sector

In India variety of coloured fish is available. Cultivation of coloured fish is also in practice in India. The two most successful aquarium exporters are from West Bengal only. There happens to be three of four villages in 24 Parganas (South) and in Howrah where the entire village depends on coloured fish farming. On the other hand history of unscientific aquarium fish culture is still in the hand of woman. Govt of West Bengal established 150 no of women Fisher co – operative and above 5000 women SHG group mainly on ornament fish culture.



Now total 7-10,000 (approx.) of (including breeders, collectors, shopkeepers, small agents, allied product manufacturers) people are directly involved in this business. In a thorough survey programme at the particular zones where the clusters of microenterprises are established in Sunderban area we have observed some unique phenomenon, like women participation, transaction strategies etc.



- Development of a microenterprise has enhanced the assets of Sunderban people by successfully using their own resources, a few people tried to set up a very new concept of fish farming at very low cost. There, some years ago, (at least 25 years) they maintained aquarium fishes in some earthen tubs, locally known as 'Mazla', and thereafter they successfully established a few breeding (ornamental fish) units of some common fishes (Gold fishes, Mollies, Platties, Sword tails etc.). They sell their products to local hobbyists and retail shops.

WOMEN PARTICIPATION

- In some of the areas, mainly Amtala, Bishnupur and Udayrampur of south 24 Parganas district under study the women apart from activities as wife, mother and home maker that engage them from dawn to dusk, show a greater participation in income generating activities because:
- They show a comparatively better literary percentage
- Get the advantages of both village and city life
- Are economically more independent
- Follow less vigorous social taboos
- **Along with men of the Sunderban areas they perform tasks that mainly include cleaning tanks, fish rearing, collecting fish feeds, feeding the fishes, fish sorting and fish packaging. In spite of this, the daily routine of women consists of live stock raising, vegetable gardening, working in household etc**

- It is one of the most important issues on microenterprise development (Mukherjee. et. al. 2002). At least 200 women operated co-operative societies and 1500 women Fisher group, only on Ornament Fish, are setup by the Govt. of W.B. with the help of NCDC and NFDB regarding ornamental fish farming for the proper upliftment of the women of these areas.



Requirement and possible areas of development

- Those who are involved in culture are facing problem of water quality management , special training facilities to be developed for the same.
- Marketing facility for SHG run ornamental fish culture units has to create in the vicinity.
- Marketing facility for fish products like dry fish, etc needs to give more attention.
- Monetary Assistance for dried fish units are not sufficient needs its enhancement
- Road connection / connectivity to main land requires improvement ---initiatives has to be taken
- Salary of the women workers involved in different fisheries units like BENFISH, Fish processing industries requires “Negotiations”--- need to start with the relevant authorities.
- More capacity building on integrated fishery and post harvest technology for the SHG members.
- Popular Radio and TV programmes with local /National / Inter- National success stories are need of the hour .
- Alternate livelihood development, like canal culture/ silvi- culture for seed collector has to be start immediately



To foster the growth of new spin-off women enterprises in the aqua industries a few projects have to be taken up like -

- **Production of balanced fish feed using low cost local ingredients.**
- **Organic fish pond fertilizer.**
- **Mass cultivation of some algae and use it as fish feed.**
- **Aqua soluble Drug development for fish from aquatic flora and fauna.**
- **Development of different organic fish toxicants**
- **Project report and consultancy service for entrepreneurs**

Fisherman culture, their song and their heritage is now in endangered



- First, linkages between the laboratory and the field have weakened the possibility of aqua-industry cluster. Second, ecological foundations essential for sustain advances in aqua-industry (sure supply of raw materials), such as soil water and aqua-biodiversity are under severe anthropogenic pressures. Third, credit flow and resource flow (electricity etc.) to the aqua culture industry sector is still in infant stage.



productivity enhancement, quality production and value addition revolution are urgently needed in aqua species production and processing. To provide overall co-ordination, it will be advisable to establish a multi-stakeholder industry cluster at Sunderban.

- “Educate your women first and leave them to themselves, then they will tell you about what reforms are necessary for them. Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way” (Swami Vivekananda—Rebuild India, page—32).

