

CASE STUDY



A BOAT OWNER



COVID-19 Effects on the Fisheries Sector in the Gulf of the Mottama



A Crisis within a Crisis?

Small-scale fishers, mud crab fishers, workers in post-harvest, workers in the processing factories, workers in fishing boats, rice fish growers and women small-scale sellers are the most affected population of the Fisheries Sector by COVID-19 in the Gulf of the Mottama. The global pandemic caused social burdens to them in food shortage and food crises together with economic losses and lack of income. In the Gulf of the Mottama, food availability is reduced in most of the households and stocks in the market. The pandemic also affecting a rice planting cycle of rain fed farmers as a whole in 2020 season.

Migratory fisheries may lead to risk exposure to virus infection

Fishers, sellers, and processors faced risks of COVID-19 spread and infection. Access to health services for them and for rural fishing communities are difficult even under normal situation. It is harder for the most vulnerable people and small fishers to accessing testing, treatments, and sanitation supplies.

U Soe Paing, an owner of 30 foot long boat

U Soe Paing from Waebadan village in Paung Township tells how COVID-19 has affected his fishing activities and family with economic losses and social stresses. He was a chair person of Community Fishing Boat Association, 140 boats associated. He has been working as a fisher for over 25 years and has been participated as an active community member in the Gulf of the Mottama Project.

"Inland fisheries, inland aquaculture and marine fisheries are the most affected sectors by the pandemic and fish price has been decreased by 30% to 50%."

Daily catch was increased in COVID-19 period

U Soe Paing used to conduct the off shore fishing activities in the Gulf of the Mottama, ten to thirty miles far away from his village. He owns a thirty foot long boat with one grill net, one drif grill net and one zame net. He could hire six workers for the whole fishing season with full paid. He used to catch *Hilsa*, *Ngapothethin*, and *Ngayaung* species mostly about 60 to 100 viss in 15 fishing days a month. He sells the

fish in the village market, in the town markets sometime and to the collectors with higher price those who used to send export to the boarder countries. During the pandemic, he caught more fish about 150 to 200 viss and could make 20 to 30 viss of fish to be salted. The catch size is depending on the opening of fishing season by local authorities after three months ban for breeding, May to July.

Catch in a month	Before the pandemic	During the pandemic	Difference In %
Two tides a month	100-150 viss	120-200 viss	Δ 30%
One tide a month	60-100 viss	80-120 viss	Δ 20%

Catch fish before and during the pandemic of U Soe Paing

Fish price was decreased by 30%

When COVID-19 has been infected to the people in the local markets in Mawlamyine local government imposed travel bans, exports, trades, and all sales for one month and more. This has caused temporary restrictions of access to local markets and created decreased income to the fishers, boat owners, processors and traders. This also has affected U Soe Paing's family business and income. He had to manage the catch fishes by selling in the village with low prices, below of 30-50% of normal price, 9,000 K per a viss (equals 6.5 USD). And his wife helped him by making dry fishes and had to find a way to sell dry products with lower price again. These efforts could not provide the minimum running costs including salaries, fuels, gears, and licensed fees.

Income a month	Before the pandemic	During the pandemic	Difference In %
Two tides a month	4-5 Million K	3-4 Million K	▽ 20%
One tide a month	3-4 Million K	2-3 Million K	▽ 30%

Income before and during the pandemic of U Soe Paing

Is the Gulf of the Mottama as a window of opportunity through for the small scale fishers?

He has a good faith on re-opening of fishing activities in 2021 with multitudes of good returns from the small business. And he has been waiting to receive the supports from local government on cash and food supports. His family has received a basic food package and a small amount of cash support from local government. And he shared about government support for fish breeders as he heard from the people.

He has shared an opinion of fisheries sector relief that enables the small scale fishers and boat owners through provision of a relief loan and possibility of extension of fishing season in 2021. He repeated his strong faith on re-opening of fisheries sector by echoing his opinions. However, he knows a small amount of an opportunity of window through the Gulf of the Mottama Project which he has been engaged for community fisheries management. He wants to get any kind of support from Department of Fisheries

although he used to pay fishing license fees and tax at Thahtone district office.

He asked the Gulf of the Mottama Project to facilitate the discussion with DOF to provide small amount of supports to the fishers and boat owners like him. And he wanted to get support from the GoMP to seek diversified livelihood and income opportunities. He had received a fishing training from the GoMP while he has been participated in the project. With the support of the project, he has worked together with the peer fishers and boat owners to assess the community needs on knowledge and inputs to build the capacity of the fishers and to improve livelihoods.

"I want to do another income opportunities through a poultry farm or a swin bladder dealing or integrated fish farming".

As he was a chair of community fishing boat association in the village, he could learn to protect natural resources by community based natural resource management approaches from the project. He shows his satisfaction to the project for promoting the lives of fishers and preserving the natural resources in the GoMP. He reports about reduction rate of illegal fishing practices of the people in the villages and improved compliance practice as per information he received from the project and DoF.

Cash support as an option for the boat owners

U Soe Paing has accessed micro-loans about 1.5 million K from local loan providers such as BNK, Tinbawthee, Stapler, and Nandarhlaing with 2.5% of interest rate. Upon the return, he can get additional amount of loan exceeding up to 4 million K. During COVID-19, he could not access any cash or loans from loan providers as they close the office until local government grants approval to resume their operation.

Having with an expectation from DoF and local government, he strongly recommend to provide a relief loan to the small scale fisher which can serve as an option of COVID-19 relief and response plan whether it takes through government or NGOs.

"I think, a relief loan would be an option for us and for the small scale fishers".