

CASE STUDY



A FISHER



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



How COVID-19 has effected the fishers?

COVID-19 has brought plenty of social and economic burdens and stresses to the small fishers and fishing communities in the Gulf of the Mottama. Challenges were associated with limited access to public services like health, education, transportation, government supports, credit and jobs. Public services and government offices have stopped for months to reduce the exposure risk of the virus and to avoid the infection. Government imposed travel and movement restrictions have created slow of local economy and stopped the supply chain services. For the small holders and small scale fishers, income has reduced about 30% to 50%. They have been in trouble to find a minimum pay jobs in the communities. Household heads have been in worried to provide food and sufficient income for the family members.

Without fisheries activities, many have been in troubles with financial problems especially for low income families in the GoMP. Low income has

impacted some extend to social status and that incapable to the people to access the public services. Reluctant to access the public services is highly reported. They have been in lacking of capabilities to relieve the financial problems and debt issues. That has created low confident in women and reluctant to go to the clinic regularly, even for the severe cases. They used to take generalized and low cost drugs without physician guide. It is harder for the most vulnerable people and small fishers to accessing testing, treatments, and sanitation supplies needed to address the virus infection effectively.

In terms of access to health and COVID-19 information, they could access through radio, television and internet for some fishers. Low income families are not able to use the mobile phone and limited to access the information through internet.

However, they are aware of preventive actions to fight against COVID-19 by washing hands, wearing face masks, and keeping distancing. Access to face masks is a common challenge for the fishers those who do have access the local markets and not able to buy with low income conditions.



Boats are docking in the small canal, Thahton Township

Can U Aung Win continue to catch Croker and Grey Mullet?

U Aung Win is a fisher from Thahton Township, Mon State and leading seven household members. He has been working as a fisher since 2000s. He is working also as a secretary of Community Fishers Group. He employs two full time workers with 36 foot long boat with engine. He used to catch *Croker and Grey Mullet* in the gulf of the Mottama where is three hour drive from his home.

Income and production a month	Before the pandemic	During the pandemic	Difference In %
Catch rate per day	480,000 K (40,000 K per viss)	260,000 K (13,000 K per viss)	▽ 54%
	8-12 viss	15-20 viss	△ 50%

Income per catch size of a U Aung Win before and during the pandemic

He used to work fishing activities for 20 days a month (7-8 days in neap tide and 12-13 days in spring tide).

During COVID-19, the catch size has significantly increased into 50% in two tide a month. However he gets lower price during COVID-19 and he could not sell all amount of catched fishes. With low price, his income has reduced by 54% compare to normal situation. He could still survive during COVID-19 and he does not need to borrow money.

Travel restrictions have limited the fishers to buy fishing gears in the market

Government imposed travel bans and lock down practices were not allow U Aung Win to buy necessary fishing gears and tools. The price of fishig gears was increased a little. He has faced difficulties to buy fishing nets and ice for fish preservation for extral fishes.

Local transportation and intown movement have been restricted due to COVID-19 reasons. It has stopped supply chain services and slow the flow of commodities across the regions. According to the

fishing season, he cannot do fishing activities during close seasons. The closing of fishing season from June-August has favored positive increasement of fish stocks in the GoM. During the closed season, all fishers have to repair the gears, boat, engine and make necessary preparations. Without access to the market, they can not prepare well enough for their gears and tools. Access to fishing inputs and gears for inland and marine fisheries has reduced by 40% to 50 % of market access in Bago Region and Mon State.

Cash: Most relevant solution for the fishers

U Aung Min could share his daily income to two labours and the rest for the family expenses. And he does not need to land the money. However, the small fishers need minimum of income to buy basic foods, rice, pulses and oils for the family. They were not able to access credit from money lenders in the villages. Government has provided the emergency food bag and relief cash (5 units of food items and relief cash 40,000 K) for low income families. U Aung Min has received these support in two trenches. He has seen that these supports were very useful and relevant for the small scale fishers through COVID-19 reliefs while they have been in difficulties.

"The cash support is one of the most useful resources for the fishers. We need emergeny cash for maintainance and buying fishing gears for coming season."

U Aung Min has a wish for government and department of fisheries to provide effective supports for the small scale fishers and fishing communities through conducting a need assessment that will cover the needs, gaps and challenges of fishing communities. He proposed the possible provision that can be manageable with loan forgiveness for small-scale fishers and farmers. And he has highlighted the loan extendson to the farmers through the support of Myanmar Agriculture Development Bank.

U Aung Min suggests that the distribution of relief loan should be conducted based upon needs and operational relevancy. The selection of beneficiary needs to be conducted in transparent way. The existing financial institution and credit schemes from government and private sector can play significant roles to distribute financial resources in timely and effectively. And he suggests the conditional extension of fishing season is allowable and manageable by DOF. He wants to see the direct supports from relevant entities from government or private sector or donors to address the needs, gaps and challenges of fishing communities.