

POLICY BRIEF



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



How COVID-19 has effected the fishery sector in the Gulf of the Motta?

The global pandemic COVID-19 is a multifaceted human crisis effecting every country. The pandemic has become far more than a health crisis that has effected with catastrophic impacts on social and economic (WHO 2020). The effects of the pandemic may lead into short-term and long-term crises in all development areas. COVID-19 situation is constantly evolving, further monitoring will be required to fully understand the impacts across the sectors (UNOCHA 2020).

Since the first infected case of COVID-19 was reported in March 2020, Myanmar has responded COVID-19 first wave with quick actions. With potential for infection hotspots to develop in densely populated urban areas, and other major cities and towns were spread of the virus with speedy casualties (HAG 2020). In the response to the pandemic, Myanmar has prepared the sector-wise responses to minimize the risks and to stabilized the economy into two ways of strategic actions through COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan (CERP) in April 2020 and COVID-19 National Response and Recovery Plan (CNRRP) in September 2020 (GoM).



Economic growth of the country is projected to drop from 6.8 % in FY18/19 to 0.5 % in FY 19/20. Tax revenues are

projected to decline by 6.0 % (World Bank 2020). A negative growth of between – 2.4 to – 1.1 % is forecasted for agri-food system GDP in 2019/2020 (IFPRI 2020). Industrial production of the country is expected to contract by 0.2 % in FY 19/20 as restrictions of access to labour and supplies of the inputs. To relief the impacts, International development partners have contributed about \$2 billion for the implementation of the CERP quickly.¹ (\$50 million by World Bank², \$25 million by EU³, \$150 million by ADB provided \$150 million loan⁴ to boost country's economy targeted for SME, tourism, transportation, logistic and supply chain services).

Effects on the Fishery Sector

COVID-19 effects on fisheries sector is reported as a record-breaking year for fishery exports. The pandemic hit about 40% of production of 4,900 livestock and fisheries breeding businesses. Fishery exports earning is expected to drop down by 30% of annual earning as over \$81 million a month in the fiscal year beginning in last October and \$651 million in total until May 2020.⁵ The impact has cascaded down the fisheries value chain, leading to delays in transport and logistics and large quantities of spoilage (DOF 2020).

¹ The Irrawaddy News (2020)

² World Bank (2020)

³ Frontier Myanmar (2020)

⁴ Asia Development Bank (2020).

⁵ U Ye Tun Win, DG of Livestock and Veterinary Department.

Fisheries Data of Myanmar⁶⁷

5.97 million tonnes of fish produced (2019)

3.24 million tonnes of fish produced by Marine Fisheries (54% of total fish production)

2.73 million tonnes of fish produced by Inland Fisheries (46% of total fish production)

29,455 registered fishing vessels (12,583 non-powered vessels, 13,831 powered vessels, 3,030 national offshore vessels, and 11 foreign offshore vessels)

3.2 million people working in fishery and aquaculture (57% in freshwater fisheries and 43% in marine fisheries)

800,000 workers employed in aquaculture

300,000 workers employed in processing factories

3.5 % of country GDP is shared by fisheries

6% of population received livelihood supports from fisheries

Fisheries Data of the Gulf of the Mottama

32,133 fish ponds in acre (31,132 in BG and 1,001 in Mon)

1,164 shrimp/prawn ponds in acre (40 in BG and 1,124 in Mon)

76.678 million of hatcheries in 2019 (72.217 M in BG and 4.461 M in Mon) from 4 hatchery sites in Bago Region

320 Drift nets in Mon State

528 MT of ice production per day from 29 ice plants in Mon State

68 Resource Conservation Trainings conducted in Mon State

22 Fish Health and Diagnostic Trainings conducted in Bago Region

634 Aquaculture Trainings conducted in Bago Region

Fisheries Data of Myanmar and the Gulf of the Mottama

With the expectations of regenerating the economy in the late 2020, the fishery sector has reopened after July. The government has approved K6 billion for fish breeders including K10 million for trawlers, K100 – 200 million for Jetty owners, K300 million for seafood producers and processors.⁸ The funds were distributed to develop fish ponds across 150,000 acres of land. From the injection, about K1.4 billion was allocated to support training and technology for breeders (DOF 2020). Despite, the selection criteria were still need to be cleared in transparent and accountable ways of management.⁹

Government supports for fisheries sectors

	Food distribution to low income families (5 basic food items)
	40,000 K as relief cash to low income families (included all small-scale fishers and farmers)
	6 billion K for fish breeders (fish ponds across 150,000 acre)
	1.4 billion K for training and technology for breeder

Government supports for fisheries sector

Effects on the small fishers

COVID-19 has caused amount of social and economic burdens and stresses to the small fishers and fishing communities. Challenges were associated with imited access to public services like health,

education, transportation, government supports, credit and jobs. Government imposed travel and movement restrictions have created income reduced from 30% to 50% of monthly income. The household heads were worried about inavailability of food for the children and lack of income for the close season about three months.

Low income fishers have multitudes of social issues as they are relectant to access the public services. They have been in lacking the capabilities to relieve the financial problems and debt issues in the family. Low confident in household women has created social barriers to go to the clinic, even for the severe cases. When they are in sickness, they take low cost drugs without a physician guidance. It is harder for the most vulnerable people and the small fishers to encourage to accessing the testing, treatments, and sanitation supplies for prevent COVID-19. The fishers are well informed about preventive actions from DoH to wash hands properly, to wear the face mask, and to keep social distancing. Access to face mask is a common challenge for the fishers those who do have access to town and city.

Income and catch rate of a fisher

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

Income and catch rate of U Aung Win, a fisher from Thahton

Fishing activities during COVID-19 were limited by travel restriction. Fishing days were not changed 20 days a month (7-8 days in neap tide and 12-13 days in spring tide) except the close season. During COVID-19, the catch rate has increased up to 30%-50% in two tides a month. However the fish price was reduced significantly from 30% to 50% due to sell the fish with low price. This directly effected on income decreased by 30 to 50% in most cases.

Effects on the processors

Department of Fishery reports that 70 % of fishery products are produced for direct consumption and about 10 % is for processing (dried fish, dried shrimp, fish sauce, shrimp sauce, fish paste, spices, salted and agaragar by the coastal and the inland fishing communities). With other fishery activities, COVID-19 has lessened production and income of the processors, women who have been working as a local enterpranuer through processing businesses. In this activity, women labours are highly depending for daily wages or monthly paid.

⁶ DOF, Fishery Statistics 2019.

⁷ FAOSTAT. 2018. Statistics Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Available at <http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#country/28>. Accessed on 28 May 2018.

⁸ Hein, Zeyar and Mya Htwe, Chan, Myanmar govt channels funds to support fisheries sector, Myanmar Times, 14 July 2020.

⁹ Interviews with the fishers and the processors in the GoMP project

The study of HELVETAS has shown the experience of a woman processor from Paung Township on the effects of COVID-19. According to the fishing schedule for a month, a middle scale processor can operate the processing activities for one tide with 15 days. The monthly income is expected to receive 3 to 4 million kyat. During the pandemic, the income has reduced from 20% to 25% even the stocks and catch rate have been increased.

Income and production a month	Before the pandemic	During the pandemic	Difference In %
Two tides a month	6-7 Million K	5-6 Million K	▽ 25%
	50-60 viss	55-65 viss	△ 10%
One tide a month	3-4 Million K	2-3 Million K	▽ 25%
	25-30 viss	27-35 viss	△ 10%

Income of a processing business before and during the pandemic

Effects on the exporters

Another case of the study shows that 80% of people in the GoMP assumed that the fishery sector has been dropdown in pre and post production, export sector would be the most effected.¹⁰ Boarder trade with Thailand has closed temporarily due to second massive hit of virus infection in September 2020. China Boarder Trade Authority has banned frozen food imports over virus fear in November 2020 due to the reported cases of contact with drivers and contaminated cold-chain products.

Most of the cold chain factories and processing factories in Mon State have been shutdown since July 2020 and resumed in late September. Exports need COVID-19 clearance and application of the certificate has been delayed due to closure of government offices. Scale of fishery export is depending on the scale of orders from China and Thailand in the GoMP. Processing facilities are required to impose sanitation and safety measures. Government support is needed to monitor the processing plants and protection for the workers from COVID-19.

These conditions have driven the processors from Mawlamyine with the expectation on DOF and the development partners to facilitate the consultations of resuming the market access and its' stability.¹¹ One fishery exporter from Mawlamyine has reported that he had to cut 50 jobs out of 120 jobs and reduced 50% of annual income due to reduced order from China and the local buyers. To adapt the given context of COVID-19, he reduced the scale of monthly production by 50%. The exporters have survived without income or less income for three months while most of the cold chains and processing factories have been shutdown in August 2020. They had to retain skill labours by provide partial salary and wages. They have sought the existing markets in Yangon and Mandalay with low price deals.

¹⁰ Interview with U Myint Soe, Chair of Mon State Fisheries Federation, by The Frontier, June 2020.

"I wish to see normal operation of the market and its stability." (An exporter from Mawlamyine)

Recovery Actions for the Fishery Sector

While the pandemic is still unfolding, there is an urgent need to coordinate, plan and implement effective short-term and long-term responses. Rapid mobilization of the resources and inputs are needed in support of fishery sector. The following options will be serving as suggestive and recommendations drawn from the views of people in the Gulf of the Mottama. Immediate impacts and results can be created in working with other sectors agriculture, livestock, and trade promotion additionally.

Recommended actions drawn from the study of HELVETAS

- Establish effective coordination to address fisheries sector needs, gaps and challenges in economic recovery.
- Provision of emergency cash for small fishers and vulnerable fishing communities.
- Emergency and relief loan will boost up the reopening fishing sector including fishing activities, production, processing and trade.
- Food distribution and support is still needed to provided to low income households for a certain period 6-12 months.
- Resuming of fresh products and sea food processing needs immediate supports for safety and health check certification by FDA.
- Provision of seeds and fingerlings by DoF is urgently needed for aqua farmers and inland fisheries.
- Mobilization of resources is needed to learn across institutional and sector-wise from damages and losses.
- Minimize unnecessary controls and burdens, the design and implementation of rescue policy package should be focused per local needs together with prioritization of recovery actions
- Conditional extension of fishing season is allowable and manageable by DOF
- Re-opening of processing facilities, entering the processing facilities need safe working conditions and fair prices.

¹¹ Interview with a staff from the GoMP project

PROPOSED ACTIONS

Proposed Actions to Build Back Better Fisheries in the GoMP	Timeframe
Local Government	
Providing immediate and durable relief packages, aid and loan forgiveness for small-scale fishers and fish workers in the post-harvest sector in study areas.	Short-medium term
Ensuring access of health services by rural people and rural communities for community fisher groups, private and public sector including young fishers, women fish sellers, trawlers, mud crab fishers, aquaculture farmers,	Short-medium term
Prioritizing re-opening of fishing and production activities to provide food security and livelihoods for domestic consumption and exports	Short-medium term
Facilitate implementation of safeguard supply chain in working with private sector in Mon State where fish exports industry is potentially grow.	Short-medium term
Protecting workers from COVID-19 and exploitation from labour abuse and child labours	Short-medium term
Facilitating consultations of boarder trade and international market access	Medium-long term
NGOs, Development Partners and Academia	
Mobilization of resources for market development in both local markets, retail shops and boarder trade exports	Medium-long term
Draw insights and experiences from communities and fishers, field sites to develop and reshaping country programs	Medium-long term
Engage and advocate for the needs of CBOs and CSOs in better fisheries management	Short-medium term
Assisting monitoring in impacts of the fishers and implementation of sectoral and CERP	Medium-long term
leverage coordination and collective actions to support effective respond by government and private sector	Short-medium term
Support responsible market development with respective entities from PPP	Medium-long term
Documentation of nationwide lessons and learning that reflecting socio-economic losses and prepare better resilience fisheries management	Medium-long term
Donors	
Re-orientation and flexibility of funding programs and targeting supports to reach to smallholders and rural fishing communities	Medium-long term
Private Sector	
Facilitate strengthening social safeguards and ensuring health preventive measures in fisheries industries	Medium-long term
Safety of workers and market access; buyers should stay engaged with suppliers sourcing from small fishers	Medium-long term
Distributors should ensure trading patterns are maintained and ensured access by smallholders	Medium-long term
Relief and flexibility of credit and loans terms and conditions within extendable and applicable	Short-medium term
Community members	
Strengthen community monitoring system on IUU cases	Medium-long term
Enhance information and communication networks across states and regions to share good fisheries practices	Medium-long term
Participatory learning and action researches on community based fisheries management and natural resource management	Medium-long term