



# International Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Studies

ISSN: 2347-5129

(ICV-Poland) Impact Value: 5.62  
(GIF) Impact Factor: 0.352

IJFAS 2015; 3(2): 55-57

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www.fisheriesjournal.com

Received: 28-08-2015

Accepted: 01-09-2015

## Pollobi Kalita

Pass out M.Sc. Student (2015),  
Department of Zoology, Pandu  
College.

## Parag Deka

Assistant Professor, Department  
of Zoology, Pandu College,  
Guwahati-12, Assam, India.

## Socio-Economic condition and livelihood status of Fisher around the landing sites of Motapung-Maguri Beel of Tinsukia District of Assam, India

Pollobi Kalita, Parag Deka

### Abstract

The study relates to the socio-economic condition of the fisher community of adjoining area of landing sites of Motapung Maguri Beel (wetland) of Tinsukia District, Assam, India. The result shows a very miserable condition. Fishing was found to be the prime business of the studied area of the beel. The literacy among the respondents is very poor where a majority of them are illiterate. Among the literates, none has been found to have education above the 6<sup>th</sup> standard. Most of the fisher was in middle aged with daily income ranges from Rs. 100 to Rs. 1300. The poor condition of most of the fisher may be due to high family size, scarcity of alternate employment opportunities, low education level, no nearby market for selling of fish, dependence on middle man for selling of fishes, non-availability of own fishing net are the prime cause for the same.

**Keywords:** Fisher, Motapung-Maguri Beel, Socio-Economic.

### 1. Introduction

In Assam capture fishery is endowed with many flood plain wetlands from two major river systems namely the Brahmaputra and the Barak river system. The flood plain wetlands are important fisheries resources of Assam to fulfil the state's domestic demand for fish along with providing cheap human nutrition and generating the state economy as well. The wetlands provide diverse benefits to the society particularly the livelihood of the fisher. In India, developments of fisher are often restricted to the traditional fishing communities near the coastal areas while the interest of those associated with inland fishery is relatively neglected (Dutta and Kundu, 2007) <sup>[2]</sup>. The demand for fish in Assam is about 2.95 lakh metric tons per year and the production is 2.82 lakh metric tons per year from both culture and capture fisheries (Directorate of Fisheries, Assam). The state has to import fish from other states of India like Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar to supply the demand. Fishing is, therefore, an important business in view of income, employment generation and supporting livelihood and in this regard the fisher community plays an important role for the same. Notwithstanding, the research related to the socio-economic condition of the fisher community, however, is very scanty in flood plain wetlands in India causing lack of information on this area to formulate developmental programmes for them. The present study is therefore, an attempt with an aim to investigate the socio-economy condition of the fisher community of Motapung-Maguri Beel (wetland) situated at Tinsukia District of Assam, India.

### 2. Materials and Method

The present work was based on the studies carried out for a period of 5 months, commencing from Jan, 2015 to May, 2015 in a wetland named Motapung-Maguri Beel (wetland) situated at 11 km away from Tinsukia District Headquarter and at the south-east side of the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park. The study was based on the analysis of data regarding various aspects of socio-economic condition of fisher community who were involved in fishing both permanently (as the primary income source) and partially (as the secondary source of income). A household survey was conducted with the help of the prepared questionnaire. A door to door survey was carried out and in that process; the fisher mostly the one who earn a living for the whole family were interviewed. Since the people were mostly illiterate, the questionnaires were not distributed to get their responses. Instead, each item of the questionnaire was recorded in the appropriate column of the questionnaire. During the discussions, the problems

### Correspondence

#### Parag Deka

Assistant Professor, Department  
of Zoology, Pandu College,  
Guwahati-12, Assam, India.

were discussed one by one and the outcome of the discussions were recorded systematically to know more about the wetland and the socio-economic conditions of the people living in the studied area of the wetland. During the study, data were collected from forty fisher families selected randomly using well-structured questionnaire from the area adjoining to the landing sites of the beel.

### 3. Results

From the data collected, it has been observed that fishing is the most common occupation of the people found in the adjoining area of Motapung-Maguri beel. However, besides fishing some of them are also engaged in agriculture such as banana and seasonal vegetable cultivation. Most of the fishers (22.5%), however, engaged in the nearby tea gardens as labour along with fishing. 62.5% people are engaged in fishing as their only income source whereas fishing along with banana cultivation was found to be 10% and fishing and vegetable cultivation was 5% (Figure-1). Notwithstanding, daily income (Figure-2) from fishing was ranged from Rs 100-1300, where Rs 100-200 daily income from fishing was found to be maximum (47.5%) and 100-600 or above was minimum (5%), with an average labour work of 4-6 hrs a day in fishing.

From the data collected from the fisher, it is revealed that the highest production of fish and benefit from the same was found from October to December (as per opinion of 67.5% fisher) (Figure-4). It has also well observed that production is increased from October of the year.

During the study, it was found that the age of the fishermen surveyed varies from 21-60 years or more. In the study, age of the fisher were classified into four groups as young aged (21-30 years), early middle aged (31-40 years), late middle aged (41-50 years) and old (51-60 years or above). The study also showed that majority of individuals involved in fishing in the age range between 41 and 50 years (37.5%) and the least is in between 51 and 60 years or more (12.5%) (Figure-5).

The family size of the fisher was divided into three classes as small, medium & large size. From the study, it was found that, the most of the fisher family were composed of 5 to 6 members (40%), marked as medium family, small sized (2-4 persons) was the minimum (25%) and large family (7 or above) was intermediate (35%) (Figure-6). Among the people surveyed, maximum number of individuals were illiterate (62.5%), even some fisher have never gone to school but somehow they have learnt to sign only (12.5%). Some individuals have studied till primary level (22.5%) and hardly a few individual had gone upto 6 standard (2.5%) (Figure-7).

The study also revealed that 57.5% fisher had their own fishing gear, the rest of the fisher have to depend upon their neighbour, retailer and wholesaler for fishing gears resulting low income (Figure-8).

During the survey attempts were made to find out the condition of living of the fisher. The housing conditions of fisher were divided into four categories: 1. House with straw roof, 2. Kacha house with tin roofing, 3. Semi pacca house with tin roof and brick wall upto base of the window and 4. Pacca house with tin roof with brick walled and concrete floor. From the survey, it was found that the most of the people (45%) have *kacha* house with tin roofing whereas only 10% of the people have *pacca* house and the rest have *semi-pacca* and *kacha* house with straw roof. This indicates the people in the adjoining areas of the beel were of moderate condition and their only source of livelihood is the beel itself and they did not have any other water body for their fishing activity.

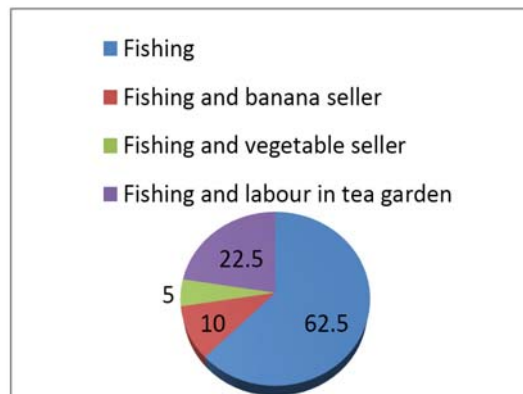


Fig 1: Occupation of the people

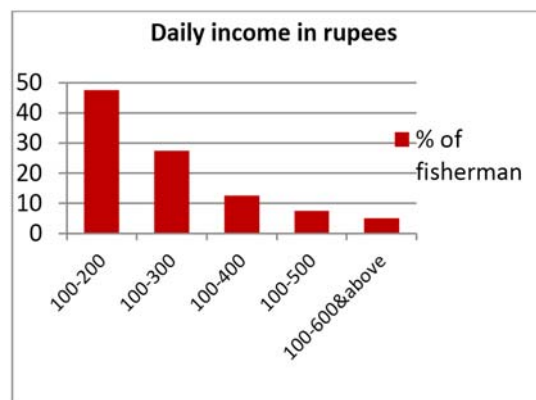


Fig 2: Income of the people

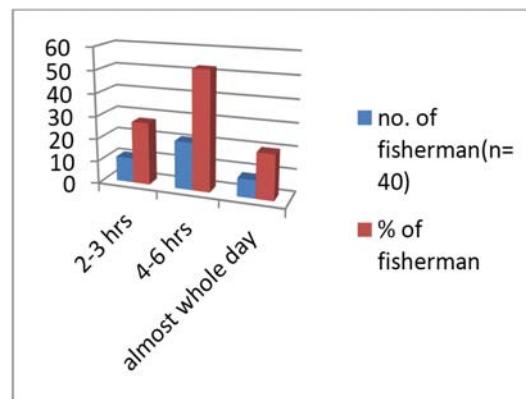


Fig 3: Working hour of the fisher

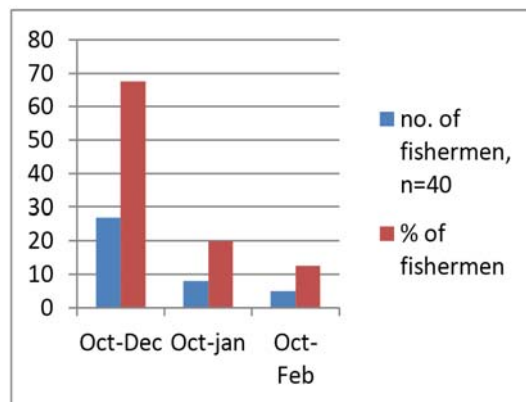


Fig 4: Fish production statistics

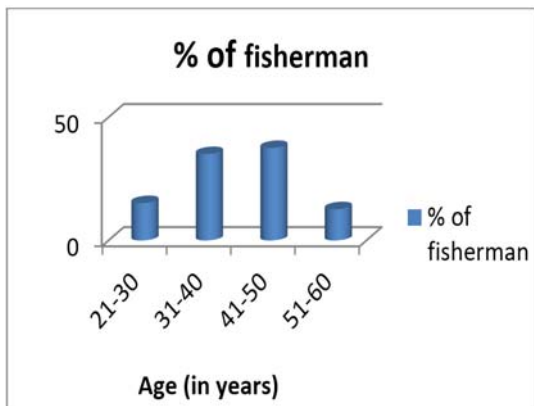


Fig 5: Age distribution of the fisher

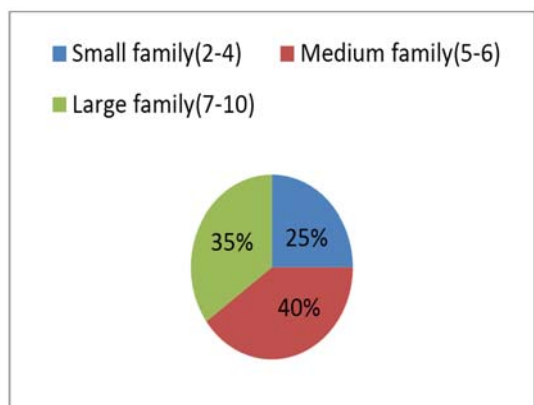


Fig 6: Family size of the fisher

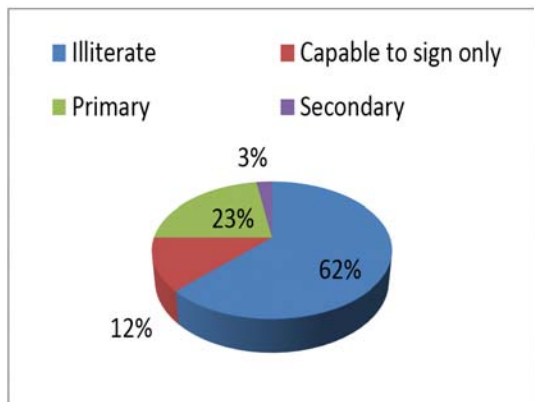


Fig 7: Educational qualification

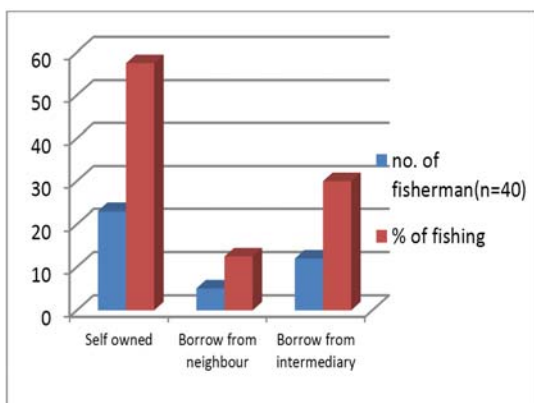


Fig 8: Source of fishing gears

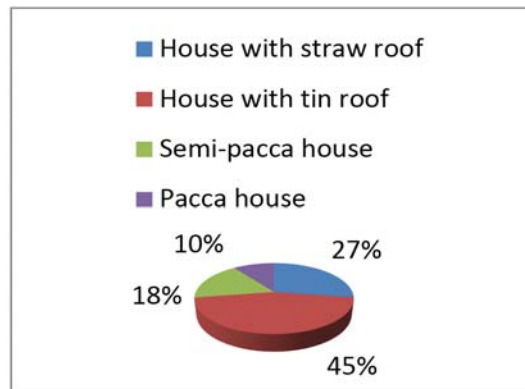


Fig 9: Housing condition of the people

#### 4. Discussion

The present study highlights some factors for their poor socio economic condition and low standard of living. The prime factor for this is the lack of social infrastructure in their villages which is also reported from different studies on fisher communities by Bhaumik and Pandit (1991)<sup>[1]</sup>; Goswami *et al.*, 1994<sup>[3]</sup>; Sheikh and Goswami, 2013<sup>[4]</sup>. Secondly, educational development is not satisfactory which is considered as the most essential prerequisite for the all-round development to fight against social injustice, because education play a crucial role regarding technical and economical information about their occupation (Sheikh and Goswami, 2013)<sup>[4]</sup>. Being illiterate the fisher are exploited by the middlemen (Bhaumik and Pandit, 1991)<sup>[1]</sup>. Thirdly, the studied areas are situated far away from town area and due to lack of nearby market; they have to depend upon the wholesalers and middlemen for their fishes to be sold. As a result they did not get the actual price that they should get for the fishes. This disparity of selling fishes at a low price against purchasing household requisites at a high price contributes to the poor socio economic condition of the people. Moreover high family size, scarcity of alternate employment opportunities non availability of fishing net are the prime cause for poverty of fisherman.

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