Socio-Economic Transformation & Upliftment Project Malkangiri (Odisha)

Malkangiri is the southern-most district of Odisha. It is one of the most economically backward tribal districts of Odisha. Almost the whole of the district is a vast dense jungle, with a very small percentage of the population residing in the urban areas. The eastern part is covered with steep ghats, plateaus and valleys, sparsely inhabited by primitive tribes, notable among them are Bondas, Koyas, Porajas and Didayis.

Swabhiman Anchal: 151 villages of Chitrakonda blocks were cut off from the mainland in 1972 because of the Balimela reservoir created due to a hydroelectricity project. Since then the villagers had to travel up to 60 km by boats. Due to extreme remoteness and only land link with AP, the area became a haven for Maoists. In 1982, the State Government had planned to construct a 'hanging bridge' on the Gurupriya river, but the construction was hampered due to Left Wing Extremist (LWE). The Gurupriya bridge construction was completed in 2018 under Security by Border Security Force (BSF).

Key Issues

Agriculture is the main occupation of the vast majority of the population. However, because of forest cover and rugged terrain conditions of the district agriculture is largely confined to Kharif crops. Tribal communities are dependent on forest and subsistence agriculture for living. However, agriculture was underdeveloped and forests were subjected to high levels of deforestation. With low levels of income, crop failures, and non-availability of other livelihood opportunities most of the families preferred to migrate to other states.

The major surface water bodies are reservoirs, rivers, streams and ponds in the district. Balimela reservoir in Malkangiri district is the third largest reservoir of the state having a water area of 16059 ha. Fishermen belonging to nearly 2000 families from the surrounding villages depend on this reservoir for their livelihood. Because of poverty, the fishermen operating the reservoir are unable to afford for stocking of required size and quantity of fingerlings. Due to a lack of awareness on stocking fingerlings, proper fishing and marketing, they were unable to get substantial income from it. So, the income generated from the production was approx. Rs. 5000 per family.

Key Objectives

The key objective of the project is to create Sustainable Livelihood opportunity for 2000 Fishermen under the scheme of Socio-Economic Transformation & Upliftment (SETU). The department intended to improve the IMC population of the reservoir through

systematic stocking of advance fingerlings over a period of five years which would lead to enhance fish production from the reservoir. As long distance transportation of fingerlings lead to heavy mortality, it is proposed to create basic infrastructure facilities in the reservoir sites such as captive pen nursery to rear adequate advanced fingerlings to the size of greater than 100 mm (50 to 100 gm). It will ensure to increase the fish production qualitatively and quantitatively.

Strategy

151 villages of 9 GPs had got cut off from the mainland in 1972 due to construction of the Balimela reservoir. It is the third reservoir of the state having a water area of 16059 hac. Basically, the dam was utilized only for hydro Electricity Power stations. So, the District Administration has decided on suitable utilization of the Balimela reservoir by initiating Fishery Intervention for Fishermen's Community.

For the development of Swabhiman Anchal, a special scheme named Socio-Economic & Transformation Upliftment (SETU) was launched by the State Government. Along with other developmental work in Swabhiman Anchal, there was a strategy to create livelihood benefits for 2000 local fishermen families by stocking 5 crore fingerlings in Balimela reservoir.

Suitable Market is the important factor of any product. Malkangiri is locational advantage for fish marketing. Andhra Pradesh is the adjacent state of Malkangiri where an enormous fish market is available. Nearly 2000 fishermen families reside nearby Balimela reservoir. So, having the traditional fishing knowledge among local farmers, which helped to implement the project.

Intervention Strategies

It was not easy to implement the new initiative in Swabhiman Anchal. The District Administration faced many challenges. Due to cut-off area there were no means of communication and was a high presence of LWE activity.

To implement the project, District Administration adopted three operational strategies to make this project fruitful.

Back-end Infrastructure

Community engagement seeks to engage the community to achieve sustainable outcomes. The project can't be successful without the involvement of local communities. It was decided that the project will be implemented by the fishermen's community to form a Cooperative Society. District Fishery Department was mobilized the fishermen community to form Primary Fishermen Cooperative Society (PFCS). Finally, there were 10 PFCS formed and 1635 HHs were associated with the PFCS.

Secondly, Captive Pen Nurseries were developed in the district, so that required fingerlings can be available for the project.

Thirdly, due to the lack of money, they could not buy net etc. So the department provided equipment support like Boats, Nets, Life Jackets, Additionally, Educational support such as scholarship was provided to the child for higher study and health insurance like Group Accident Insurance up to rupees five lakhs was also provided.

Process Augmentation

Stocking of advance fingerlings was the first priority of the Fishery Department. More than 5.37 crore fingerlings stocked in a phase manner. All fingerlings were stocked in the presence of Monitoring Committee and PFCS representative to ensure community participation.

Secondly, dedicated training center building was created. Several exposure visits and skill upgradation trainings were provided to PFCS members. During the intervention major technical support was provided by the District

Fishery Department on stocking of quality IMC fingerlings, Post stocking management, Management of fish production and stocking of fingerlings in reservoir,

Thirdly, for livelihood augmentation, 68 Village tanks and 115 farm ponds developed in convergence with MGNREGS to augment own fish consumption and to support ancillary livelihood activity.

Forward Linkages

Forward linkage approaches help the producers to get higher amount of benefit from the product. There were strategies to develop Storage and Processing unit. In many villages, Fish drying yards are provided by the District Administration and storage facilities made available for them to keep live and dry fish as per their requirement. For electricity, 220x33 KV substation established for smooth running of cold storage. For better communication, Auto rickshaws and bikes with ice-box is provided.

Secondly, Fishermen societies are tagged to BSF camps and SSD hostels for supplying fish. For easy marketing, local Haat infrastructure has improved under Special Central Assistance.

Sustainability

The sustainability plan spells out how a Project will survive in the long term. It makes sure

that resources spent on the project are not lost. It gives reassurance that the project will have a long lasting impact. There are some key factors that led to the success of the project. First of all, the project is implemented and monitored by the community. There is an active involvement of PFCS members. The major responsibilities of PFCS are to implement catch fish regulation, mesh size regulation, selling of hygienic fish, stocking of quality IMC fingerlings and marketing fish production.

Secondly, regular supervision is being done by the District Fishery Officer, Assistant Fishery Officer and District Verification & Monitoring Unit. Technical assistance was provided to the PFCS members by the Fishery Department.

Thirdly, Fishery Department has ensured stocking of fingerlings in regular basis for better production and better financial return to the fish farmers. Fishermen are provided infrastructural assistance and marketing support. Fishermen societies are tagged to BSF camps and SSD school for fish supply.

Outcome

The value of any project cannot be measured without defining success. It has laid significant impact on the overall socio-economic status of 1635 fishermen households.

Impact on Social Perspectives

Fishes are considered highly nutritious products of the aquaculture system due to the presence of well-balanced macronutrients such as proteins, lipids and micronutrients. Improvement in nutritional status among women and children can be seen.

The pronounced impacts are - the PFCS members helped police and excise to check illegal hemp cultivation. Due to the new initiative, the LWE problem got reduced and motivated others to join the mainstream.

Impact on Economic Perspectives

The species stocked in the reservoir are compatible with the ecosystem and not affected by other aquatic species. Regular stocking of IMC fingerlings, increased the production from 6.23 kg to 125 kg per hac.

After getting benefits from the project in form of input assistance like boat, net and life jackets, now they are able to catch an average of 10 kg per day. Average income has also increased from Rs.5000 to Rs.1.20 lakhs per Annum.

The project is based on community participation and highly economical thus increasing the socio-economic status of the fishermen of the locality.