

ICSF Occasional Paper

**A Study on Migration of
Fishers from Kanyakumari to
the Cooperation Council for
the Arab States of the Gulf
(CCASG)**

Vishnu Narendran



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Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|---|
| ASEAN | Association of South East Asian Nations |
| CCASG | Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf |
| CSOs | Civil society Organisations |
| EEZs | Exclusive Economic Zones |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organisation |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| GCC | Gulf Cooperation Council |
| GPS | Global Positioning System |
| ICSF | International Collective in Support of Fishworkers |
| ILO | International Labour Organisation |
| MEA | Ministry of External Affairs |
| MHA | Ministry of Home Affairs |
| MOIA | Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| NGOs | Non Governmental Organisations |
| OWWA | Overseas Workers Welfare Administration |
| PGE | Protector General of Emigrants |
| POEs | Protector of Emigrants |
| RECOFI | Regional Commission for Fisheries |
| SAARC | South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation |
| UAE | United Arab Emirates |
| UNCLOS | United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea |

INTRODUCTION

Following the 1970s spurt in global oil prices, large scale developmental activities started in the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (CCASG), popularly known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)¹ countries resulting in a movement of labourers and workers to the region from the neighboring regions of the GCC. Due to shortage of an indigenous labour force, GCC countries started drawing more and more labourers from the relatively inexpensive South Asian region. By the mid-1980s what had started as a trickle had transformed into a tide and India became the largest supplier of labour to the Gulf. Following workers in other sectors, fishers also started moving from India to the GCC countries in search of better opportunities and income. The Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu, India, is believed to have the largest number of fishers working in the GCC countries on board fishing vessels. (Lok Sabha debates, 2010)

Though fisheries is not a major contributor of income to the GCC countries, the economic diversification unfolding in the GCC states coupled with a high rate of population growth makes it difficult for the ruling class in the region to neglect the sector. Countries in the region are promoting investments in fisheries sector as part of their economic diversification plans and also to boost domestic seafood production in order to meet the rising demand and also to attain food security. GCC has one of the fastest growing populations in the world and is forecast to increase by one-third, to 53m people by 2020 (The Economist, 2009). One of the significant features of fishing sector in the GCC region is that fishing in most of these countries is done by migrant fishers from India, particularly from Kanyakumari district, Tamil Nadu. In addition to difficulties one may face in a foreign country, these fishers also have to face several disadvantages and uncertainties because of the peculiar nature of their work and also the geo-political and strategic location of these destination countries. Unlike several other sections of migrant workers in the GCC countries, living and working conditions of fishers have never received the attention of academia or media that they deserve either in the sending or in the

1 GCC was founded in 1981 as a political and economic alliance of six Middle Eastern countries-- Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

receiving countries. This study aims to look at the situation of these migrant fishers to get a better understanding of their recruitment, living and working conditions on the one hand and to fishing practices on the other that sometimes lead to the arrest and detention of the fishers within and outside the GCC region.

Rationale

The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) has been engaging with issues of concern to fishers and fishworkers since its inception in 1986. ICSF, for example, had worked to improve conditions of Filipino workers on board Taiwanese vessels in the 1990s. ICSF also engaged with the process leading to the adoption of the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007. In December 2013, ICSF organized a regional labour dialogue in Bangkok on irregular or undocumented migration of fishers into Southeast Asian fisheries, especially into the Thai fishing industry, and related labour and fisheries management issues with a view to improving conditions of migrant fishers on board these vessels through legal and policy reforms. The current study is to look, from the perspective of migrant fishers from Kanyakumari district, Tamil Nadu, India, at conditions of work in the GCC region. ICSF believes that improving working and living conditions on fishing vessels can positively influence fisheries management outcomes. In addition to these, the recent incidences of accidental deaths and detention of Indian fishers while at work in the GCC countries (The Economic Times, 2014) have prompted ICSF to take up such an exploratory study on migrant fishers from India in the GCC region. In the context of migrant fishers from Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu, India, in the Gulf region, the objectives of the study are:

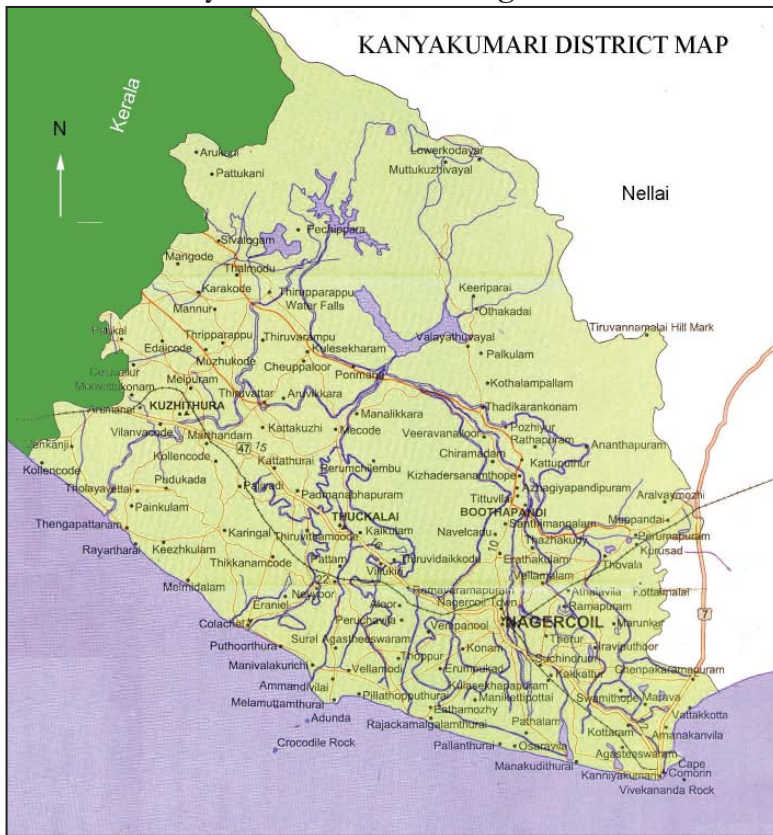
1. To get a picture of the region's fishing pattern and management practices
2. To map the migration process of fishers from Kanyakumari to the GCC member countries, to document their living and working conditions, including their occupational safety and health on board, and social protection. It also examines the socio-economic impact of their migration on society and families back home.
3. To get a picture of the institutional and legal regime governing labour migration from India and also the major international instruments for the protection and welfare of migrant workers.

Methodology

Consistent with the definition of a migrant fisher as used in the Bangkok labour dialogue, a migrant fisher is defined as a fisher employed on board a vessel registered in a State of which he or she is not a national (Deleon and Mathew, 2014).

Due to the lack of secondary sources of information on the qualitative and quantitative aspects of migration into GCC fisheries, this study is dependent mostly on primary data from Kanyakumari villages that send fishers to the GCC countries. The study mainly gathered data based on semi-structured and informal interviews with randomly chosen migrant fishers fishing in the GCC region and returnees from selected villages of Kanyakumari district. Semi-structured interviews gave some space for migrants to raise their own points of view and voices. Based on population and geographical spread, six out of 47 fishing villages in Kanyakumari district were selected for the study (two villages falling within the high population class, two falling within the medium population class and two in the low population class). Colachel and Neerodi fall under higher population villages, Rajakkamangalam Thurai and Enayam Puthen Thurai in the medium level and Arokiapuram and Eraymanthurai at the lower level. Villages were selected on the basis of population because of the unavailability of any data on the number of migrants from each village in Kanyakumari with the Government of India or with any Tamil Nadu state departments.

Kanyakumari coastal villages MAP



Sample villages and population

| Villages | Fisher Population |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Colachel | 9947 |
| Neerodi | 7035 |
| Rajakkamanglam Thurai | 4367 |
| Enayam Puthen Thurai | 5128 |
| Arokiapuram | 2259 |
| Eraymanthurai | 2280 |

Source: CMFRI, Marine Fisheries Census 2010

Data was collected from five fishers currently working in the GCC countries and from three returnees from each of these six villages. In total 48 fishermen were interviewed for the study: 30 who are currently working in the GCC region but at home on leave and 18, who are returnees from the GCC region. The number of informants was limited to five and three from each village because of the difficulty in getting access to fishers, due to the fact that many of the migrants who are on leave for a limited period are, most of the time, busy with personal commitments and the rest of them go out for fishing daily. Mothers/spouses of 12 fishers who are currently working in GCC were also interviewed with regard to their views on migration. The number of interviews of family members was limited to two in each village due to time constraints and difficulty in meeting them.

Interviews were also conducted with private travel agencies, who are responsible for arranging all necessary travel documents of fishers to migrate and fish in the GCC region. Civil society Organisations (CSOs) and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working both in countries of origin and destination were also interviewed to understand the recruitment process, the problems faced by fishers during recruitment and while working and also to examine policies and practices for the protection of the migrant fishers.

One focus group discussion (FGD) each was conducted in three villages with local school teachers and village elders to understand the socio-economic conditions of the migrant family and the implications of migration of fishers, especially on families and communities in Kanyakumari.

Secondary sources were also accessed to get information on fisheries and the legal status of international migrants in the fisheries sector and the social security arrangements, if any, in place for them. The major limitation of this study is that it is entirely based on what is reported by migrant fishers and returnees; that the

information is not verified with fisheries or migration authorities in the destination countries.

Profile of the respondents

Despite Kanyakumari being a district with a high literacy rate none of the fishers interviewed had completed high school. All of them dropped out of school and went for fishing either because of their lack of interest in studies or to bring some extra income to the family. The ages of those who were interviewed varied between 23 – 54 (currently working in GCC and on leave) and 30 – 65 (returnees).

The report is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the fishery and fishing patterns in the GCC countries; the second part looks at the fishers' migration: their recruitment, living and working conditions at destination countries and the impact of the migration on their local society and family; and, the third part deals with legal instruments dealing with labour migration.

GCC Map



GCC FISHERIES AND FISHING PATTERNS

During the 1950s and 1960s, the global catch from commercial fishing grew three times faster than the world population. Later years witnessed more or less stagnated or declining fisheries production. It has been observed that similar to many fishing areas around the world, capture fisheries in GCC waters are also facing depletion. The GCC has a seaboard of about 7,000 km. The GCC region is bound by the marine waters of the Red Sea, the North Arabian Sea, and several gulfs. Fisheries in the GCC countries are mainly artisanal in nature. Though industrial fisheries are in operation in countries like Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia mainly targeting shrimp, artisanal fisheries is the largest by volume and value in the region (FAO, 2006).

According to 2012 GCC status of fisheries and aquaculture, the total fish production of the region stood at 377,871 tonnes, of which 351,096 tonnes came from the marine sector and the remaining 26,775 tonnes from aquaculture (Feidi, 2014). The GCC nations rely heavily on fish imports for their domestic consumption. According to 2011 data, the GCC nations together imported fishery products worth 407,695 tonnes. Average per capita fish consumption in the GCC is estimated at 15.3 kg per annum, with UAE topping the regional rankings in the consumption of seafood with 33 kilograms per person (BQ Doha, 2014).

There are mainly two types of vessels that are used in the GCC countries for fishing. The first category is: Bigger boats or 'launches' as they are called. These launches (boat length approximately 16 – 24 meters powered by outboard engine 200 – 400 hp) employ 10 – 13 workers. The second category is: smaller boats or 'tarads' (boat length approximately 8 – 14 meters powered by outboard engine 75 – 150 hp) carry 2 – 4 fishers. Bigger launches generally undertake 7 – 10 days fishing trips while the smaller tarads usually operate on a daily basis.

The boats are multipurpose fishing boats. Major gear for fishing are *gargoor*s (traps), fixed or floating gill net and hand lines. While trawling is banned in both UAE (1980) and Qatar (1992), industrial trawling mainly targeting shrimp is practiced in Oman, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Demersal species like orange spotter groupers (locally known as *hamoor*) of all sizes and emperors are generally caught in traps around the year. Gillnetting, both large and small mesh size, is also an important fishery; the main target species by the large mesh size are narrow barred Spanish mackerel, seer fish, large Jacks and trevallies, and large barracudas. Hand lines, troll lines, and long lines, are also important fisheries; most of the catches of these methods are demersal species like orange spotted groupers and some pelagic species like seer fish. Bigger launches generally undertake 7 – 10 day fishing trips while the smaller tarads usually operate on a daily basis.

Country-wise fishery details

BAHRAIN

Bahrain is a group of islands with a coastline of 590 km. The fisheries of Bahrain are entirely artisanal in nature, following the prohibition on industrial shrimp trawling activities in 1998. Fishermen in Bahrain are categorized into full-time, part-time, occasional and recreational. An estimated 2,727 fishing boats operate in Bahrain waters (Fisheries census 2014). In total there are 4,707 full time fishers according to the 2004 survey. Out of that 2,993 are non-Bahrainis. By law non-Bahrainis are prohibited from practicing commercial fishing. But it is unclear whether non-Bahrainis can employ a Bahraini skipper.

Fishery commodity balance from 2007 to 2009

| Year | Production (MT) | Import (MT) | Export (MT) | Total Supply |
|------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| 2007 | 15011 | 4373 | 9884 | 9500 |
| 2008 | 14175 | 6832 | 7902 | 13105 |
| 2009 | 16356 | 7112 | 9537 | 13931 |

**CIO (Central Informatics Organization), Kingdom of Bahrain*

OMAN

The Sultanate of Oman has a coastline of 1,700 km. There are several types of fishing vessels operating along the coast of Oman, these vessels vary in their size, operating period, amount of catch, type of gears used and in their engine power. Except long liners all others are multi-gear fishing boats. According to Oman's Fish and Agricultural Statistics, 2012, in total there are 42,553 artisanal fishers in Oman. No data is available on the number of migrant fishers.

Total Landing from 2010 -2012 (artisanal fisheries)

| Year | Total Landings (MT) |
|------|---------------------|
| 2010 | 146,964 |
| 2011 | 151,490 |
| 2012 | 188,817 |

(Fish and Agricultural Statistics, 2012)

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia has a coastline of 2,640 km (approx), occupying 80 per cent of the area of the Arabian Peninsula, bordered on the west by the Red Sea and on the east by the Gulf that lies between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula. Fishing operations are undertaken by both large and small fishing vessels. The traditional or artisanal fishery as well as industrial fisheries operates in both the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf areas. In the Arabian Gulf, the industrial sector is solely concerned with shrimp production while the artisanal sector uses fish traps (locally known as ‘gargoor’), gillnets, hand lines, trolling and small shrimp trawl nets (FAO, 2004). In the Red Sea area, artisanal fisheries production is almost entirely from hand line and gillnets methods, while the industrial fleet utilizes fish and shrimp trawl nets and purse seine nets. The industrial vessels operating in the Red Sea area utilize trawl nets to target both demersal fish stocks and shrimp, with the majority of these vessels belonging to Saudi Fisheries Company and operating out of Jizan on the southern Red Sea coast (idib). In 2010, Saudi Arabia had a fisher population of 11,680 in total and out of that 8,490 were migrant fishers (FAO, 2012). In 2007, migrant fishers numbered about 8950. Currently Saudi government is trying to “Saudize²” the fisheries sector. But it is not clear how they are going to replace these migrant fishers with Saudi citizens taking into account their general apathy towards such low paid jobs. Suppose Saudis are not found? Will they still insist that no migrant fishers be employed?

Historical trend of total catch

| Year | Total catch in MT |
|------|-------------------|
| 2008 | 43489 |
| 2009 | 41604 |
| 2010 | 39081 |

QATAR

Qatar has a coastline of 560 km (Approx). Like that of the other GCC countries, fisheries of Qatar is also artisanal in nature. Government closed the shrimp fishery in 1993 in response to declining landings and there has been no production since then. As a result of this closure, finfish landings from the artisanal fleet now comprise over 98 per cent of the total landings by Qatar’s fishing fleet. In 2012,

2 Saudization of the fisheries sector refers to encouraging increasing numbers of Saudi citizens to be involved in the sector. An example includes: new entries to fisheries cannot get a license to go fishing unless he uses a Saudi crew in the boat which should be 10 metre boats only. It encourages vessel owners to hire citizens of Saudi Arabia, rather than migrants.

Qatar had 3573 fishermen and 499 boats in comparison to 3641 fishermen and 497 boats in 2011.

Historical landing trends

| Year | Total Landings in MT |
|------|----------------------|
| 2010 | 13760 |
| 2011 | 12995 |
| 2012 | 11273.5 |

UAE

UAE has a coastline of 1,318km. The fisheries of the UAE are also artisanal in nature. The majority of the catch from all sectors is taken from Abu Dhabi Emirate, since this Emirate comprises over 65 per cent of the sea area of the United Arab Emirates. The total number of fishermen UAE had in 2007 was 21,220 in comparison to 13,538 in 2005. The number of fishing boats UAE had in 2007 was 5571.

Historical catch trends

| Year | Total catch in MT |
|------|-------------------|
| 2010 | 79610 |
| 2011 | 75147 |
| 2012 | 72728 |
| 2013 | 73230 |

Source: UAE National bureau of Statistics, 2013

KUWAIT

Kuwait has a coastline of 195 km. Fishing is a part of the traditional heritage of Kuwait and, apart from the industrial shrimp fishery, remains essentially artisanal in nature. The 2007 catch production was 4,373 tonnes consisting of 2,833 tonnes of finfish and 1,540 tonnes of shrimp (FAO, 2009). Recent data is not available.

Legal framework for fisheries management in the GCC region

Despite being coastal countries, all the GCC economies except Oman have a high import dependency on fish. In addition to the low-level of productivity of marine waters in the region, it is also facing threats from uncontrolled and unsustainable developmental activities as well as problems of pollution from high volume and

density of marine shipping. (Sultan, 2012). A major threat to the marine ecosystem in the region comes from the massive modification of habitat by dredging and converting shallow productive marine areas into real estate, causeways, tourism resorts, recreation, and industrial facilities (*ibid*). Effective management of the marine resources in the region is complicated by the often shared nature of the resources. Absence of cooperation and lack of strong commitment make it difficult in realizing the intended results of many of the fisheries management plans in the region. All the countries in the region have agencies for the management and development of marine fisheries. These agencies are either specific fisheries ministries or departments within the agriculture ministry. None of these management agencies in the region have enforcement powers. Instead, arrangements are in place with either the coast guard or the navy (or both) to enforce fisheries legislation, often as part of their regular patrol duties (FAO, 2006).

Almost all fishery management practices of the GCC countries rely on input control measures. Fisheries management plans in the region also lack long term strategic views; instead most of the countries tend to focus on the resolution of existing short term problems. According to 2004 FAO country review of fisheries, Kuwait was the first country in the region to introduce management measures for its fisheries, particularly shrimp fishery. These management measures included closed areas, minimum mesh sizes and fishing capacity control through limited entry. Other countries in the region also later introduced a number of regulations to manage exploitation of their marine fishery resources.

Oman, through Sultan Decree No 53/81 (1981) issued regulations prescribing fees for fishing licenses. According to the decree, Omani fishery companies and institutions operating in Omani fishing zones may not use foreign-owned boats unless permitted to do so by competent authority which has power to levy appropriate tolls on use (art. 24). Both fishermen and fishing boat should have license and owners of the fishing vessel must maintain a fishing operations log book on board (art. 29). Although small in comparison with the artisanal sector the industrial sector in the GCC region is much better regulated (FAO, 2004). Apart from licensing both vessel and fishermen, by supplying fishing gear such as net, government is indirectly able to control gear specifications such as mesh sizes etc.

In Saudi Arabia, a permit is necessary for both boats and fishing crew. Fish species and fishing periods are specified in permit. According to the Royal Decree No M/9 of 27 Rabi Awal 1408 (1987) fishing in territorial waters by foreign fishing vessels is not allowed without a permit issued by the Minister of Agriculture and Water, with the approval of the Prime Minister. Companies and institutions engaged in fishing, extracting, processing or marketing living

aquatic products must maintain records of production according to weight, species and quantities exported or sold in Saudi Arabia. In addition to these measures Saudi government has also introduced certain controls such as prohibition of the use of poisons, explosives or other harmful substances for fishing; restricting ownership of artisanal vessels to one per fisherman; establishment of marine protected areas; maintaining closed seasons (variable) both in the Red Sea and in the Arabian Gulf; mesh size restrictions etc. In addition to restrictions, the fishing industry, particularly the artisanal sector receives significant government subsidies in the form of soft loans and grants.

In UAE, according to article 9 and article 15 respectively of Federal Law No 19, of 1993 in respect of the delimitation of the maritime zones of the United Arab Emirates, fishing in the territorial sea is reserved to United Arab Emirates nationals; foreign fishing vessels may be granted access to the EEZ, taking into account the measures regarding the conservation of living resources. Licenses shall specify target species, fishing methods, fishing area and permitted quota of catch. Trawling has been banned in UAE from the 1980s. Fishing regulations in UAE differ from Emirate to Emirate. Initially there were no gear restrictions for commercial fishing, apart from the total ban on trawling activities. However, a limit of 100 fish traps (gargoor) per vessel has been introduced in 2003 in Abu Dhabi Emirate although no gear restrictions currently apply to other Emirates (FAO, 2004). In 2004, the number of traps allowed per boat has increased to a maximum of 125.

In Qatar any person engaged in fishing needs a license for his fishing vessel and has to submit data specified by the competent authority. According to article 5 of law number 4 of 1983 on the Exploitation and Conservation of Living Aquatic resources in Qatar, the Minister in charge will identify reserved areas and the means for their protection; specify locations where catch is seasonally prohibited, and specify those seasons and the species to which prohibition applies. Since 1992, trawling has been banned in Qatar.

In Bahrain, Article 3 of the Legislative Decree No 20 of 2002 regulating the fishing, exploitation and protection of marine living resources prohibits fishing without a license in its territorial waters. Foreign vessels may be granted a fishing license by the Minister of Commerce and Agriculture only if they are registered as fishing vessels in their flag country. Industrial shrimp trawling is banned in Bahrain from 1998 onwards.

Since most of the legal documents and other ministerial decrees of GCC countries are available only in Arabic and data available with international organizations such as FAO are not regularly updated it is difficult to get a clear and detailed picture of the recent regulations.

International and regional instruments

The introduction of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provided a new direction and framework for the management of marine resources. The new legal regime of the oceans gave coastal states rights and responsibilities for the management and use of fishery resources within their EEZs. Except UAE, all other GCC countries have ratified UNCLOS. However many of the countries in the region are not able to achieve maximum benefits from fisheries within their EEZs due to lack of experience and physical resources.

Further, the 1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries provided a necessary framework for national and international efforts to insure sustainable exploitation of aquatic living resources in harmony with environmental management activities. Subsequently, a Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) was formed by FAO in 1999 bringing together the countries of GCC, Iran and Iraq. It was established by the Member Countries to facilitate and reinforce regional collaboration with regard to the protection of fisheries resources in the region. The Commission is the governing body of RECOFI. It is composed of one delegate from each member country. The Commission has established two subsidiary bodies, the Working Group on Fisheries Management and the Working Group on Aquaculture. The Commission is empowered to adopt conservation and management measures, binding once adopted by a two-thirds majority of Members present and voting. RECOFI appears as a convenient and valid mechanism to promote and enhance the regional dialogue and cooperation for the sustainable development of regional fisheries. Unfortunately members are not making the best use of the available mechanism. Low participation in the work of the Commission and significant unsettled arrears are not positive indicators of members' commitment to the sustainability of regional fisheries and of their fishing communities. The Seventh Session of RECOFI was held in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, from 14 to 16 May 2013. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and UAE were not present. Much more can and should be done with regard to RECOFI. Members should be more actively involved in the work of their Commission to fully benefit from its services.

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing is one major obstruction on efforts to manage fisheries in a sustainable way. In one of the workshops organized by RECOFI on combating IUU fishing in 2009, member countries blamed it mostly on illegal incursions by non-flag states' fishing boats in their own EEZs/national waters and on usage of illegal gear by the recreational fishers.

In the 2009 RECOFI workshop, Dr Piero Mannini, RECOFI Secretary and Senior Fishery Officer, FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa, Cairo,

Egypt recalled that only one Member from the GCC countries was party to the 1993 FAO Compliance Agreement and two Members were party to the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement. He strongly urged that consideration be given to the ratification of these instruments, as called for in the International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IPOA-IUU)³, as a basis for potentially powerful regional fisheries cooperation through RECOFI.

3 The IPOA-IUU was developed by FAO as a voluntary instrument, within the framework of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, in response to a call from the Twenty-third Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI).

LABOUR FLOW TO THE GCC COUNTRIES

This section deals with fishers' migration; their recruitment, living and working conditions at destination countries and the impact of migration on their local society and family.

The unprecedented scale of development projects in the GCC countries following the October 1973 "oil boom" led to an extremely rapid increase in the demand for labour from outside the GCC region, as the GCC labour force at that time was too small and without the necessary skills to execute these projects (Rahman, 2010). However mass naturalization of foreign labourers was never undertaken by any of the GCC rulers to address labour shortage. While migration into GCC began in the 1950s and 1960s, it exploded with the discovery of oil in the 1970s. Initial migrants were almost all from surrounding Arab nations—in particular, large numbers of Palestinian refugees displaced during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, and Yemeni workers fleeing the devastating civil war, which began in 1962, moved to the GCC region in search of economic opportunities (Chalcroft, 2010). Many of these migrants staked a proprietary claim to the newfound oil wealth in the Gulf, which they viewed as the rightful inheritance of the entire Arab world. The idea that the borders of the Gulf States had been fixed artificially by the colonial powers to dominate an Arab nation divided into statelets (*dawliyyat*) was a central artifact of pan-Arab ideology attractive to many in the 1950s and 1960s (*ibid*). The ideology even questioned the existence of many of the GCC monarchs. It was this concern, among others, that fueled the shift from Arab to Asian labour in the 1980s and 1990s in GCC region through mass expulsion and diversification policies (*ibid*). Compared to their Arab counterparts, migrants from Asia were less interested in the local politics. To further control the migrant population numerous restrictions have been imposed such as the sponsorship system, and the rotational system of expatriate labour to limit the duration of stay of non-nationals. Despite all these restrictive measures the number of Asian migrants have soared tremendously—most of them currently come from India and other Asian countries, such as Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Rapid population growth and unemployment of local population are currently forcing some of the GCC countries to implement strong nationalization programmes. Still, migrant fishers are more than 80 per cent of the workforce in fishing.

Total population and percentage of nationals and non nationals in the GCC countries

(Latest national statistics – 2010 -14)

| Country | Date/Period | Total Population | % in total population | |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| | | | Nationals | Non nationals |
| Bahrain | June 2011 | 1,195,020 | 48.9 | 51.1 |
| Kuwait | End October 2014 | 4,079,698 | 31.5 | 68.9 |
| Oman | mid 2014 | 3,992,893 | 56.6 | 43.4 |
| Qatar | April 2010 | 1,699,435 | 14.3 | 85.7 |
| Saudi Arabia | mid 2013 | 29,994,272 | 67.6 | 32.4 |
| UAE | mid 2010 | 8,264,070 | 11.5 | 88.5 |
| Total | | 49,225,388 | 52.0 | 48.0 |

Sources: National Institutes of Statistics, latest year or period available as of October 2014

* Total provides the sum of population numbers on different dates between April 2010 and October 2014. It is not the exact total population on any of these dates.

Non-nationals from South and Southeast Asia are attracted to work in the GCC area because their actual earnings are higher than in their home countries for similar type of jobs. Majority of the migrant workers in GCC from Asia falls under the category of semi-skilled or unskilled labourers. Many of the GCC countries are often criticised by the human rights groups mainly for the poor treatment of these migrant workers. A principal area of concern when it comes to the treatment of migrant workforce in GCC member countries is the *kafala/sponsorship system*.

The *Kafala System* has cultural and historical roots in the Arab world. It comes from the Bedouin principle of hospitality, which sets obligations in the treatment and protection of foreign guests (Heeg, 2010). The *kafala* (or sponsorship) *system* emerged in the 1950s to regulate the relationship between employers and migrant workers in many countries in West Asia. All the GCC Countries have variants of the *kafala system*. It provides the legal basis for the residency and employment of migrant workers in the Middle East (25 million people in 2010, UN-ESCWA). Originally, the *kafala System* came into practice to help safeguard important documents (e.g. passports) and to protect employers' interests (in case workers got involved in crime, unprofessional and unethical conduct etc.). Unscrupulous employers and vested interest groups later started to use the system to their advantage.

Under this system a migrant worker's immigration status is legally bound to an individual employer or sponsor for the contract period. The migrant worker cannot enter the country, transfer employment, or leave the country for any reason without obtaining explicit written permission from the *kafeel*. The worker must be sponsored by a *kafeel* in order to enter the destination country and remains tied to the *kafeel* throughout his/her stay. The *kafeel* must report to the immigration authorities if the migrant worker leaves employment and must ensure the worker leaves the country at the end of the contract, by paying for the flight back home. Often the *kafeel* exerts further control over the migrant worker by confiscating his passport and travel documents, despite legislation in some destination country that declares this practice illegal. This makes the migrant worker completely dependent upon his *kafeel* for his livelihood and residency (Migrant Forum Asia, 2012). The migrant worker is unable to leave the country without the employer's consent. An exit visa is required to get out of the country – at the end of a foreign worker's employment period or if he/she needs to leave the country in between, the worker must secure clearance from his/her employer stating that the worker has satisfactorily fulfilled the terms of his/her employment contract or that the worker's services are no longer needed. The exit visa can also be withheld if there are pending court charges that need to be settled or penalties that have to be meted out.

In terms of the laws of the region, as well as the conditions under which they work, domestic workers are the most vulnerable workers. Domestic workers are excluded from the labor law in all the GCC countries. This means that while workers covered under labour law can approach the labour department in case of a problem, domestic workers cannot adopt this recourse– their only option is to pursue a court case – a lengthy and costly process that many prefer not to pursue (Motaparthy, 2015). Unfortunately migrant fishers also come under the category of domestic workers – which means the remedial measures covered by labour laws are not available to these fishers.

Human rights organizations and civil society activists have likened the system to a contemporary form of slavery. The *kafeels* meet their labour needs through immense control and unchecked leverage over workers, creating an environment ripe for human rights violations and erosion of labour standards. In sum, migrant labourers are mostly leading a vulnerable life with the threat of unpaid wages, arrest, detention, and ultimately deportation if they complain or leave their work. Even if they leave as a result of work place abuse they remain at risk of being treated as criminals rather than as victims.

This system of migration management in the GCC countries has been criticized by the UN bodies and several other human rights organizations. International Labour Organisation (ILO) in its study titled '*Tricked and Trapped*' (2013) called for ending the

“Kafala System of sponsorships”. The ILO estimates that there are around 600,000 forced labour victims in the Middle East. Human Rights Watch, an international organization in its report titled “*As if I am Not Human*” depicts the inhuman working conditions of domestic labourers in Saudi Arabia. Many undergo a range of abuses including non-payment of salaries, forced confinement, food deprivation, excessive workload and severe psychological, physical and sexual abuse.

Though there are calls from international organizations and civil society members for reforming the system, the debate is often underpinned by the fear that advocating for a comprehensive reform of the *kafala system* will lead destination countries not to reform but to seek workers from alternate countries.

FISHERS' MIGRATION FROM KANYAKUMARI TO GCC

Compared to other land based jobs, what fishing offers in terms of salary or job security seems not that favorable for younger workers in industrialized countries (FAO, 2009). Employment in fishing has fallen or remained stationary in those countries and fishers from economies in transition or developing nations are increasingly replacing local fishers in these countries (*ibid*). Although the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that the livelihood of a total of 520 million people—7.9 per cent of the world population—is dependent on fisheries, aquaculture and those supplying goods and services to these sectors, only 44 million people are estimated to be employed worldwide as fishers and fish farmers, of which 35 million are dependent on inland and marine capture fisheries for employment.

With regard to labour issues in fishing sector several problems have been highlighted.

- the vast majority of fishermen are engaged in small-scale and artisanal fishing;
- many fishermen work on vessels registered in States other than the fishermen's State of nationality or domicile;
- fishermen working in small-scale and artisanal fisheries have special problems which may require special measures;
- many fishermen live on board their vessels for extended periods of time;
- fishermen often work under an employment relationship involving many people (the system of payment based on the share of the catch); this may lead to exclusions from laws protecting most workers;
- many fishermen have only seasonal and occasional employment, at least in the fishing sector;
- efforts to reduce fishing effort may lead to insufficient income or unemployment for many fishermen;
- the low rates of trade union membership or lack of fishermen's organization may affect social protection and social dialogues in this sector (ILO, 2003).

In 2007, ILO adopted a new labour instrument called Work in Fishing Convention for fishers working on board fishing vessels. Rights of fishers, responsibility of fishing vessel owners, skippers and fishers and duties of the states were laid down for the first time in this Convention. It developed principles and criteria for the benefit of fishers working on board fishing vessels in relation to: (i) minimum requirements

for work (ii) conditions of service; (iii) accommodation and food; (iv) medical care, health protection and social security, including occupational safety and health and accident prevention and protection in the case of work related sickness, injury or death (ILO, 2007c; Mathew, 2010). Special care is given particularly to fishers working on board fishing vessels flagged by nations other than fishers' country of nationality or domicile.

As in the case of industrialized countries, younger persons in most of the GCC countries are reluctant to work at sea on fishing vessels. As a result, from the early 1980s, fisheries in most of the GCC countries have been run by migrant fishers (Bqdoha, 2013). Though fleets are owned by local people, workers are mainly from India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. In Bahrain the percentage of expatriate fishermen is about 96 per cent (Trade Arabia, 2015). Among these migrant fishers it is mainly the fishers from Kanyakumari that dominate the sector. Prospects for earning a better income pull thousands of skilled, small-scale fishers from the coastal villages of Kanyakumari, district in South India to the Middle East.

Kanyakumari district has a coastline of 68 km dotted with 47 fishing villages with a Catholic fisher folk population of 1,56,595 (CMFRI, 2012). The boundaries of fishing villages overlap with parish boundaries, and the parish priest is the moral authority of the village council (A Subramaniyan, 2000). Fishers from the district tend to out-migrate. Most of the fishers from Kanyakumari work in Kerala or in other parts of the country due to the lack of facilities available for fishing in the district. The district does not have proper fishing facilities like harbours, auction halls and cold storages. The only fishing harbours currently operational are in Muttam and Chinna Muttom and these cater only to local fishers.

Chances of earning a better income from fishing is what tempt many to go to GCC countries as fishers. Fishers usually go to the GCC countries with a plan to work there for a few years, make money and come back. But because of the debts at home most of them end up staying there for 10 – 30 years as long as they do not meet with any accident or come into conflict with the sponsor over payment or on any other issue. Unlike in Southeast Asia, all migrant fishers in GCC fishing from Kanyakumari are, presumably, skilled as well as documented workers. They are paid a share of the catch as remuneration. They do not, however, enjoy the benefit of a written contract system and are under the *kafala* system of sponsorship for work as fishers.

Interviews of forty eight migrant fishers from Kanyakumari who have either returned or are currently working and on leave will give an understanding of the process of fisher migration from India and also their living and working conditions in GCC member countries.

Pre-departure

From the interviews held with the fishers and other local social workers in the GCC countries it was very clear that due to their high skills and brave nature demand for fishers from Kanyakumari is very high among boat owners/kafeels in those regions. In the 1980s fishers used to migrate from the district to GCC countries. Some of the older migrants recalled the presence of other Arab country fishers like Omanis and Iranians in the earlier days. But they have disappeared slowly. Nowadays it is mainly Kanyakumari fishers who run the fishing activity in most countries. In addition there are some fishers from Kerala and Uttar Pradesh in India and few from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

The one and only factor which pushed all the forty eight fishers who were interviewed to decide to go abroad to fish was the need to earn a better income. All of them used to fish in Indian waters prior to their migration. It is mainly through the skippers that boat owners/kafeels hire people for fishing work in the GCC countries. Most of the time boat owners pass over the visa (usually for free) to their skippers or some known skippers of other boats, and the skipper with the help of his family, friends or through a travel agency finds a potential migrant. Out of the forty eight fishers interviewed twenty six had found work through friends, seventeen through relatives and five through travel agents. Except two of them, out of forty eight none had to undergo any medical test in India prior to getting their visa or their departure. In addition none of them got to sign any employment contract or received any documents from the sponsors.

Though it is illegal to charge for recruitment all forty eight interviewed had to pay the skipper for the visa. The amount those skippers would charge for visa from potential migrants varied from INR 40,000 – 2, 25, 000 (approximately USD⁴ 650 – USD 3660) depending on the country and the demand⁵. Visa for Jizan—a province in Saudi Arabia costs the highest, more than INR 200,000. In Jizan fishers can rent out ‘tarads’ (small boats) from the local people and go fishing. They only need to pay an amount as rent per month. .

Since none of the forty eight had cleared matriculation⁶ all of them required emigration clearance⁷ to go and work in any of the GCC countries.

4 1 USD = 62.52 INR as of 20/03/2015

5 In July 2015 the Government of India Citing Section 25 of the Emigration Rule 1983 has issued a decree that recruiting agents are directed to charge a maximum of INR 20,000 from a worker seeking employment in any of the GCC countries.

6 Usually refers to the final year of High School in India.

7 Government of India has recognized that certain countries (currently 17) do not have strict laws

Emigration Procedures for ECR Passport Holders

All persons having ECR endorsed passports and going to any of the 17 ECR countries for taking up employment require emigration clearance. A person could take up employment in a foreign country either through a registered recruiting agent or directly through a foreign employer or a project exporter. The Protector of Emigrants⁸ (POEs), after satisfying himself about the accuracy of the particulars mentioned in the application and other documents submitted along with the application, grant emigration clearance in the prescribed manner and form.

Documents Required

Semi-skilled individuals who seek emigration clearance directly from the Protectors of Emigrants (and not through Recruiting Agents) are required to produce the following documents in original for scrutiny and return:

1. Passport valid for a minimum period of six months with valid visa
2. Employment Contract from foreign employer
3. Challan towards deposit of prescribed fee
4. Insurance policy- Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojana⁹

It is impossible to get emigration clearance without submitting a copy of the employment contract. This is where the local travel agencies come into the scene. The potential migrant gets his travel documents and tickets through a local travel agent. Few of them initially go on a business visa (90 days) to bypass the emigration procedures here in India and the sponsor then changes it into a work visa after the completion of 3 months. There are reported cases of sponsors sending back the fishers after 3 months, declining to extend the visa. One among the forty eight interviewed was sent back in this manner. In the case of others who go on work visas (mainly 2 year visa) from Kanyakumari, the travel agency is believed

regulating the entry and employment of foreign nationals. They also do not provide avenues for grievance redressal. Thus they have been categorized as Emigration Check Required (ECR) countries. Hence, all persons, having ECR endorsed passports (those who have not studied till matriculation) and going to any of the 17 ECR countries for taking up employment require emigration clearance from Protector of Emigrants. All GCC countries come under emigration clearance required category.

8 The Protectors of Emigrants are responsible for granting emigration clearance to the intending emigrants as per the procedure prescribed under the Emigration Act, 1983.

9 A Pension and Life Insurance fund scheme from MOIA for the Overseas Indian workers.

to get the emigration clearance through some back door procedure in Mumbai or Delhi. If they fail to get it cleared, they allegedly “push¹⁰” them through at emigration without following the official channels of clearance. Out of the forty-eight respondents thirty boarded the flight through this route. Travel agencies in Kanyakumari use the airports in Madurai, Trivandrum, Mumbai and Cochin for such activities. Whereas thirty two of them left the country through Trivandrum, four of them flew out from Cochin, four from Madurai and the remaining eight through Mumbai. Travel agencies charge INR 5,000 – 10,000 (approximately USD 80 – 160) for these services in addition to ticket charges. Travel agencies sometimes even arrange Continuous Discharge Certificates¹¹ (CDC) for fishers and send them to a GCC country in the seafarer category to undertake fishing work. Two of the migrants interviewed had got a CDC certificate from a local travel agency and bypassed the emigration clearance procedure. They only had to undergo a medical test.

None of the interviewees was aware of or applied for any of the migrant welfare services of the Government of India like saving schemes and insurances. None of them received any pre- departure training or any information about the destination country or the nature of fishing there. Since everyone goes through private travel agencies for getting the emigration clearance, they do not have any idea about the mandatory insurance required during the procedure. All those fishermen’s passports with emigration clearance stamped shows that they had taken insurance but none of them received any papers from the agents.

Life at destination countries

On arriving at the port of destination, before starting their work some of the fishermen had to pay again for local medical insurance and for the residency card (depending on sponsor and skipper). Though it is usually employers who pay for renewing the visa in GCC countries, when it comes to fishers they themselves have to pay annually or bi-annually. Some sponsors collect it at one go; others deduct this amount from the workers’ shares in two or three installments. But none of the fishers interviewed had a clear idea of what they were paying for or what is the exact amount that they had paid/ are continuing to pay.

10 “Push” is the local term in use for getting free passage through emigration at the airport in exchange for bribes.

11 The CDC document certifies that the person holding it is a seaman as per The International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watch keeping for Seafarers (STCW), 1978, as amended in 1995.

All the fishers surveyed for the study had many years of experience in fishing in the Indian waters prior to their migration. But none of them were aware of the nature of the fisheries sector or fishing pattern in the GCC countries before departure. Except gargoor fishers interviewed had previous experience of using all kinds of gear that are used in GCC waters. Use of gargoors was very new to all of them and it took 2 – 3 days to learn the technique of fishing with them. Gargoors are hemispherical steel mesh fish traps with a revolving trap door attached to a coned gate which leads the fish towards the bait. A buoy (float) is included. Traditionally central vein of palm leaves were used to make them but now it is being replaced by steel mesh. They can be of different sizes also. Bigger boats or launches usually carry 500 – 600 of gargoors and drop them for 4 – 5 days. In between these days they fish using hand line and gill nets, which they are very comfortable with. Most of the fishers interviewed responded that lifting gargoors manually requires hard labour and 7 – 10 days of fishing trips make them tired and weak and the cold wind during the night make it even harder. Further, the maximum sleep they get is for 3 – 4 hours in each 24-hour cycle during fishing trips. The need for money forces them to take not more than two days of break in between each fishing trip. Tarads usually carry 100 – 200 gargoors and drop them and then collect the gargoors they left in their previous trips and return back. Those who fish in tarad also fish using other gears, which is easier than using gargoors, and involve daily trips of not more than 6 – 7 hours.

The skipper's tasks are usually only setting up of GPS and giving directions. All the others have to do multiple tasks on board such as deploying gear, cleaning the boat, cooking and also loading and unloading of gear, fish, ice and other materials on and off the boat before and after each trip. Fishers from Uttar Pradesh usually will have a cook on board where as Kanyakumari fishermen tend to cook by themselves on a rotational basis. In Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, for security purpose, fishers also have to stay on board the boat on a rotational basis at the landing centre.

When it comes to payment, all those interviewed for the study received/receives a share of their catch instead of monthly salaries. In Saudi, Qatar and Bahrain fifty percent of the share after all expenses (diesel/ ice) goes to the sponsor/kafeel and the remaining fifty percent is shared among the workers. The skipper of the boat gets a double share. They usually divide shares once or twice every three months. Most of the sponsors pay the fishers USD 10 – 15 for their local expenses once in two/three weeks. Recent UAE law requires a UAE national to be physically present on vessels during fishing operations and in most of the boats the sponsor employs a person on fixed rate (usually AED 3000/ fishing trip: i.e. approx USD 820) and half of his payment goes from the sponsor and the other half from the

workers. Seven of the respondents who currently fish in UAE complained that instances of the local person not turning up for work and losing a day's work is very common. Other than this extra payment for the local person, in UAE they follow the same system of sharing as in the other countries but the sponsors there pay off the employees once in two or three fishing trips.

In the case of remittance they send home, all of them use banks and other proper channels. Unlike in other sections of migrants "Hundi system¹²" of remittance was not visible among migrant fishers from Kanyakumari, mainly because of the presence of several banks throughout Kanyakumari district. Five of the respondents manage to transfer INR 40,000 – 50,000/ month i.e. approximately USD 650 – USD 800 (mainly those who work in UAE and in Jizan in Saudi Arabia). On an average, workers are able to send INR 25,000 – 30,000 (USD 400 – USD 430) every forty – fifty days. One of the skippers interviewed manages to send home around 90,000 – 100,000 INR per month. Those who earn less there go fishing even when they come home on leave. Out of the thirty respondents who currently fish in GCC waters seventeen are in this category. But each and every person fishing currently in GCC agreed that they earn far better than what they used to while working in India.

Fishers said that while in India, where the wind and strong waves can make life at sea really miserable, there the presence of several islands in close proximity makes them feel safe and comfortable even when the sea is rough. But others shared that it is very dangerous during rising winds and fog. Though in winters fish catch tends to be good, unpredictable weather and fierce winds can place their boats at risk of capsizing. Low visibility due to fog can be tricky also. But all of the fishers interviewed agreed that equipment like eco sounder, GPS and fishfinder makes the work easier in gulf waters.

In UAE all those who fish in "launches" stay on board. All of them interviewed were happy about the facilities on board. Their only worry is while at dock there is a risk that high winds can cause the tightly packed boats to smash into each other and can cause damage to boats and injuries to those who are sleeping on board. Those who work on 'tarads' in UAE stay in rented rooms and three out of four interviewed workers' rents are paid by their sponsors. In the case of Saudi, Qatar and Bahrain workers stay in rented rooms in groups of 10 – 15 and cook their food in order to minimise their expenses. All of them sleep on mats on the floor. During summers, they usually get the room air conditioned. Most of them get internet connections

12 The Reserve Bank of India describes the Hundi as "an unconditional order in writing made by a person directing another to pay a certain sum of money to a person named in the order." It was the traditional system of money transfer from the Gulf countries to India

in their rooms and talk to their families over Skype. In Saudi, Qatar and Bahrain fishers usually spend approximately USD 100/month for food, stay and telephone/internet.

In Saudi Arabia and Kuwait it is mandatory for all migrant workers to have a health insurance. It is only after showing the health card, Saudi authorities will issue the *Iqama*¹³ for a migrant worker. All the interviewed fishers who work in Saudi Arabia had health cards with them, but none of them till now were able to use it since everyone had cards which cost approximately 1000 Saudi riyals. Officially Qatar government specified the end of 2015 as the time frame for bringing everyone under the National Health Insurance Scheme. Other countries in the GCC are also in the process of rolling out mandatory health insurance for all migrant workers.

Out of the eighteen interviewed returnees half of them came home after more than fifteen years of fishing in GCC waters, but only four are happy with what they could save from working outside. Out of those four one was a skipper. Others still go fishing here in Indian waters. Most of them interviewed shared the view that it is the dowry to marry off daughters and the debts from private money lenders and banks that upset the financial calculations of an average migrant worker. Fr Churchill, General Secretary, South Asian Fishermen Fraternity (SAFF) blamed the extravagant and luxurious life style of the fishing community in Kanyakumari for this.

Antony, a fisherman from Iraymanthurai left for Qatar in 1985 and worked there for twelve years as a fisher and another ten years in Saudi Arabia. While working outside he was happy with what he was earning and led a comfortable life. He managed to build a house and gave proper education to his two daughters. He suffered a lot while he was working there but still continued for the sake of his family. In the early 2000s he left Saudi Arabia and came home. During the 2007 monsoon he lost his house due to a tidal wave attack. Though he bought a new house, he had to dispose of it due to incurring debts and he and his family are now staying at one of his relatives' house. Though he still has the opportunity to migrate and his family is pushing him to do so, he doesn't want to go through all the hardships again.

13 An *Iqama* is a residence permit issued to those expatriates who arrive in KSA on an employment visa. It is valid for 1 – 2 years.

ISSUES THEY FACE AT WORK:

Though what they earn from work is far better in GCC, they also face many issues while working there. The following section looks at the major problems migrant fishers face in GCC countries.

Problems with Skippers

One of the most common statements respondents made during the survey was that if they got a good skipper, their life in GCC was half secured. Out of the eighteen returnees nine who came back after having troubles there blamed it on the skippers. Some skippers make the fishers' life hell by treating them like slaves. Most of the fishers working there are not even allowed to use the rest room without the prior permission of the skippers. They also shared instances of being denied the time to have food while on board. It was very surprising to hear such an allegation from these fishers since most of these skippers are from Kanyakumari itself. It is mainly these fishers themselves who become skippers on a boat after many years of working with the same sponsor. Sometimes the kin of the current skipper replaces him if he shifts boats or retires. The main motive, according to fishers, behind this kind of abusive behavior from skippers is to force the workers to quit which means that the skipper can make good money through recruiting new people. The language barrier makes it difficult for the newly recruited fishers to complain about such a behavior from the skipper to the sponsor. These views about their skippers were repeated by almost all those interviewed. According to one of the very experienced fishers interviewed, every one in five freshly recruited migrant fishers returns home within ninety days of his arrival either due to issues with the skipper or with the sponsor. Thirteen of the thirty migrants who are currently working in GCC also complained about the rude and abusive behavior of their current skipper. Many of them complained of not getting sufficient time even to eat while at work. Since most of the sponsors' only contact is the skipper, workers don't get a chance to present their issues directly to the sponsor. From the landing center it is the skipper who goes to the market/auction center to sell the catch in many places and a couple of respondents shared instances where the skipper takes portions of the catch for himself and doesn't register it in the group catch. Fishers also shared instances of brawls which happened between returned fishers and their skippers in Kanyakumari when the skippers came home on leave.

Problems with sponsors/boat owners

Seven of the thirty respondents who are currently working in GCC complained of harassment and rude behavior from their sponsors. Five of them are tarad workers in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and their *kafeels* go fishing with them. This issue is

mainly reported by tarad workers since it is mainly on tarads the sponsors tend to go fishing. They reported instances of nonpayment of salary, physical abuse and rude behavior. Two of the workers interviewed who are now on leave are planning not to go back to the same sponsor and thinking of switching the country. Out of the eighteen returnees three of them also came back due to problems with the sponsor. There were also cases of denial of employment by sponsors. Few fishers reported instances of sponsors not allowing them to take the boat for a week or so after having disputes. That leaves them without a job, money and food in a foreign country. Five of the migrants who are currently on leave accused their *kafeel* of not giving them leave to go home as well. They had to request for four months to get twenty days leave. Almost all the migrant workers interviewed blamed the *kafala system* for all the ill treatment they are facing in the GCC countries. While writing this report there are twenty five fishermen from Kanyakumari stranded in Ajman, UAE for the last one year without proper food and employment. They were engaged in fishing in UAE along with a fisherman from Dubai and on April 13, 2014, the Emirati fisherman fell into the sea and died while at work. In spite of Sharjah police having freed them after an enquiry, their sponsors detained them for over 50 days and denied them employment. Though there is no direct complaint against these fishermen, yet the authorities in Ajman are not permitting them to return to their native place. The fishermen were beaten up and chased away in February this year and their passports are kept back with the sponsors. (The Hindu, 2015). There are some exceptions to this pattern. There were a few fishers who even got return tickets from their sponsors when they come home on leave. They think it is sheer luck that they got such sponsors. They themselves admitted that it is very uncommon to find such sponsors in those regions.

Market price manipulation

Another issue they spoke about is market price manipulation. This was heard from those who went fishing in Qatar. They mainly blamed the workers in the market for this. They tie up with the bidders there and try to keep the prices low. Earlier the fishers who fish in Qatar used to sell the catch in the markets of Bahrain and UAE and earned better money, but according to them, now a new rule doesn't allow them to do so. Businessmen from Bahrain and Saudi though come and buy fish from Qatar markets at a cheaper price and make good profit by selling it off in their countries.

Threats from pirates

Threats from Iranian pirates is another major issue facing the fishers while at work. Almost all of those interviewed had at least one or two experiences of pirates

attacking their boats while fishing. None of those interviewed were aware who exactly the pirates were. The only thing they knew was they were Iranians. They come fully armed and take away everything including their GPS, compass, mobile phones, fish and money. There are also instances of them shooting or attacking the fishers. While writing this report one fisherman from Kanyakumari was shot dead by Iranian pirates when he went fishing from Jubail port in Saudi Arabia (Times of India, 2015). Most of the time a sponsor doesn't bother to give any money if his boat comes under any attack or meets with any accident. Instead he takes money from the fisher's share to buy new equipment. A six member crew from Neerodi village in Kanyakumari had to come back from Qatar after their boat came under attack from pirates and the sponsor was not ready to replace the equipment and gear on board and demanded money from the fishers to do that. He was also not ready to give them exit visa without the payment of that amount. Several human rights activists and the Indian embassy had to get involved to get the exit visa. Many of the fishers interviewed spoke about similar experiences that they or their friends had faced. What they generally do if they have to leave any of the GCC countries due to an issue is to try and obtain a visa for another country in the region.

Detention of fishers in a third country

Based on newspaper and other media reports, cases of fishers ending up in other country jails for crossing their borders while fishing are also increasing these days. Some of them cross intentionally while some others cross accidentally due to wind or bad weather. From the total of forty eight respondents, thirteen got arrested on various occasions in a third country. One of them was in jail for three months in Iran. There are also cases of Iranian police arresting fishers even if they haven't really crossed the borders. Diplomats of the GCC countries blame this on the not-so-cordial relationship between Tehran and the GCC countries. The three islands of Abu Musa, Greater and Lesser Tunb at the mouth of the Persian Gulf are claimed by Iran and UAE, but have been held by Iran since 1971 (The Hindu, 2013). Fishers from UAE and Saudi Arabia end up in jails of Iran without knowing the seriousness of the issue. Often, the fishers spend 1 – 2 years in jail if the sponsor or the Indian mission does not make any arrangement to pay the hefty fine. Sr Valarmati, one of the members of Migrant Forum Asia, who has been working with migrant fishermen in Kanyakumari says in GCC they are under great pressure to keep increasing their catch. "When they fish within the territory of some of the flag states they cannot get the catch the sponsor expects, which means severe harassment when they return." There are instances of fishers getting arrested within the GCC countries also for trespassing maritime boundaries. But in those cases they usually get released after a day or two.

One of the reports published by Migrant-Rights.Org listed major incidences of detention involving Indian fishers in GCC region.

- In November 2014, 5 fishermen from Qatar were detained for 2 months in Iran.
- In June 2014, 19 Indian fishermen on four boats from Saudi were detained for six months by Iranian authorities.
- In 2012, 32 Bahrain-based Indian fishermen were arrested and detained by Qatari officials, at the height of political tensions between the two Gulf nations.
- In November 2012, 29 Qatar-based Indian fishermen were detained in Kish Island by Iranian authorities. On the very day, 30 Indian fishermen from UAE were also detained.

Absence of health and insurance coverage

This is one of the major grey areas. None of the migrants interviewed were aware of medical insurance or social security initiatives of Government of India or of the health insurance facilities in destination countries. None of the workers interviewed were aware of schemes like Pravasi Bharathiya Bima Yojana or Mahathma Gandhi Pravasi Suraksha Yojana¹⁴ by Government of India.

In the case of health insurance in host countries, hospitals and medical centers often reject migrants holding cheaper health cards from availing medical claims. Private employers in Saudi Arabia usually provide medical insurance with approximate premium of 3,000 Saudi riyals to their employees. Many fishers working in Qatar also reported to be paying an amount annually to the sponsors on the grounds of medical insurance, but none of them has received any documents till date.

Sahaya Shelton (24), a young Indian fisherman from Keezha Muttom village in Kanyakumari district, India lost his life in a tragic accident while fishing in Bahraini waters on 27th of December 2014. Shelton was among hundreds of Kanyakumari fishermen who leave home every day to work as fishers in the GCC countries. The accident occurred when Shelton's clothes got stuck in the engine of the boat while cleaning the area. Almost 2 months after his death Shelton's family is yet to receive any compensation from the employer or from the Government of India. Since there is no social security or life insurance scheme available for migrant workers in Saudi Arabia, the only hope left for family is the support from the state or the union government in India.

14 A Pension and Life Insurance fund scheme from MOIA for the Overseas Indian workers having Emigration Check Required (ECR) passports.

Issues with Indian Missions

The migrants also expressed the view that the Indian missions in the GCC countries are not very supportive. One of the persons interviewed recalled an instance when he went to complain about the nonpayment of shares by his *kafeel* to the Indian consulate in Qatar. By the time he came back to the harbor after filing the complaints, his *kafeel* reportedly got to know about it from someone in the consulate and threatened the fisher with dire consequences. Another fisherman complained that most of the *kafeels* are either well connected or are very influential people in their country. The fear of existing ties, allegedly, between embassy officials and sponsors and also the rude behavior of some of the staff at the consulates often makes the fishers reluctant to approach the consulates. Fishers, in contrast, spoke about the efficiency of Filipino missions in the GCC countries in protecting their citizens.

Absence of forums for redressal of grievances

Since the fishers don't come under the labour law of the GCC countries, they are solely dependent on the goodness of the *kafeel* to assist them during times of distress. While other workers can approach the dispute settlement department in the ministry of labour when a dispute arises, the domestic workers need to file civil cases in the primary court. Long delays in getting a final judgment from primary courts also adversely affect the workers. As there is no provision for securing temporary employment during the litigation period, the workers suffer due to lack of money and food and also face accommodation problems. Under such conditions there is little option but for the workers to surrender to the *kafeels* and waive their rights to seek redress. Spadalingam, one of the volunteers working with fishermen in Bahrain, says he comes across not less than two fishermen every week who are homeless or who have run away from their *kafeels*.

IMPACT OF FISHERS' MIGRATION ON FAMILY AND SOCIETY

Mothers/spouses of 12 fishers who are currently working in GCC were also interviewed with regard to their views on migration. All of them were very happy about their husbands or sons working in the GCC countries. None of them spoke about any difficulty they face when their husbands or sons are away. One of the striking features of the fishing communities in Kanyakumari is the high level of education among women. Out of the seven migrant fishers' wives interviewed all but two had attended colleges and one of them was a post graduate. Though all of them were aware about the country in which their husbands or sons are working, none of them had any idea about whom they were working for or any other details about their life in the GCC countries. Except for one of the migrants' wives, none of those interviewed had copies of their husbands/sons visa or passport with them.

Family members of those interviewed shared the view that they are happy about their father/husband/brother migrating since they get a lumpsum amount between INR 30,000 – 40,000 (USD 480 – 650) when the fishers transfer the money whereas when they fish in Kanyakumari their earning varies from INR 100 – 500 daily and they end up spending the whole amount on something or the other on the same day thereby leaving almost no savings. Fishers also agreed to this. They also shared that while in India they tend to go fishing not more than three to four days a week whereas in the GCC countries off days are very rare.

The only worry they expressed about the migrants in GCC is the presence of Iranian pirates in the Persian Gulf waters. According to them, the number of attacks has gone up tremendously in the last few years. All of the women interviewed spoke about at least one instance of their husband or son getting attacked by pirate groups. Absence of a clear forum when a problem arises is a major issue in Kanyakumari.

Impact on economy & society

During the three focus group discussions held in Rajakkamangalamthurai, Neerodi and Arokyapuram villages, people reflected upon the impact of fishers' migration on the local economy and society as a whole. According to them, the major impact of gulf migration can be seen in areas like housing, education and religious institutions. Coastal areas of Kanyakumari witnessed a mini housing revolution post the 1980s. Compared to the poor housing structures of fishing communities across India, living condition of the fishers in Kanyakumari district is generally far better off. Multi-storied houses with modern amenities are a common sight in the fishing villages of Kanyakumari. Same in the case of churches; almost all churches in the coastal areas have been reconstructed or refurbished.

The educational sector has also seen a drastic change from the late 1990s. Civil society leaders link this development to the remittances sent by the migrant workers from the Gulf countries. Earlier children from the fishing community used to enroll only in government schools and those schools in the coastal areas of the district used to boast of its student strength crossing thousands. But now that is no more the case; almost all the children go to private English medium schools and most of the government schools are either shut down or about to be closed down. Teachers in the area also cautioned that the financial benefits are coming at a high social cost for many families. They spoke about the increase in the number of children whose fathers work abroad becoming rebels and dropping out of school.

The major need identified by village elders regarding migrant issues during the focus group discussion was the setting up of a forum for migrant fishers in Kanyakumari. Currently if any issue arises they don't know where to go and whom to approach. Different groups and NGOs try through different routes to solve the issue and most of the times kin of those affected are unaware of the process.

Introduction of new fishing techniques

It is those who fish in GCC waters that introduced the technique of using plastic fishing lures into Tamil Nadu and Kerala a few years back. Since the cost of these plastic lures is very high in the Gulf countries, migrants now buy these from local suppliers in Kanyakumari to take it to those countries when they return.

A REVIEW OF THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND LEGAL REGIME GOVERNING LABOUR MIGRATION IN INDIA

Migration of unskilled and semi-skilled labour to work as contract labour is the most dominant form of international labour flows emanating from India. Although such labour flows, especially to the GCC countries, have attained substantial dimensions in the past two decades, lack of data about this movement of people has often bedeviled systematic appraisals of this phenomenon (Sasikumar S.K and Hussain, Zakir, 2008).

India follows a regulated system in respect of foreign employment policy. The management of emigration and its necessary documentation procedures are currently being handled by three Central ministries – the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) which issues the passports and manages the functioning of Indian Missions in foreign countries, the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) which is in charge of regulating emigration and undertakes the responsibility of protection and welfare of emigrants through the Protector General of Emigrants (PGE), and the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) that monitors the flow of emigrants from the country at the ports of embarkation. PGE under Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs is the authority responsible for protecting the interest of Indian workers going abroad. PGE is also the registering authority to issue Registration Certificate to the Recruiting Agents for overseas manpower exporting business. The Protector of Emigrants is responsible for granting emigration clearance to the intending emigrants as per the procedure prescribed under the Emigration Act, 1983. The Protector of Emigrants shall perform the functions assigned to them by this Act under the general superintendence and control of the Protector General of Emigrants. There are 9 POE offices located across India.

Poor co-ordination across various divisions within departments and across various ministries was identified to be a major problem with regard to Indian emigration regime. PoE comes under the MOIA whereas the Bureau of Immigration comes under the Ministry of Home Affairs which keeps the data concerning all those who migrate. In contrast, the MOIA only keeps data on those who migrate with emigration clearance. Since most of the fishermen migrating are unable to get emigration clearance through a proper channel and bypass it with the help of private agents, they end up missing from the list of MOIA. In official governmental papers, the number of migrants working as fishers in GCC countries from Kanyakumari is less than hundred.

The Indian Emigration Act of 1983 in its current form is primarily regulatory in nature. Consequently it has not provided the much needed legislative basis for the

promotional and welfare considerations related to migration. In recent years there has been major progress in framing of national migration policies in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Pakistan's National Migration Policy (2010) is one of the prime examples (Sasikumar S.K and Hussain, Zakir, 2008). Through the new policy, the minimum wage for migrants was raised by 16 per cent. They have also established a comprehensive social insurance scheme, health and pension for overseas Pakistanis and scholarships for migrants' children (*ibid*). But India is yet to develop such a policy. Philippine's migrant welfare programmes are considered to be a good example among global migration policy circles. The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) of Philippines Government under the Department of Labour offers three core services: repatriation, insurance, and counseling. First, the OWWA helps with paper work, coordinates with embassies, and plans repatriation for dead, sick, and distressed workers, which include the cases of catastrophes, wars, and epidemics. Second, the OWWA offers life and accident insurance that covers up to USD 2,000 for natural death, USD 4,000 for accidental death, and USD 400 for burials. The OWWA also provides counseling, legal advice, and embassy to distressed migrants. The OWWA also provides counseling, legal advice, and embassy support to distressed migrants.

International migrant workers' instruments

The ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration (2006) is a set of non-binding principles and guidelines for a rights based approach to labour migration aims to assist governments, social partners and stakeholders in their efforts to regulate labour migration and protect migrant workers. The Framework aims to foster cooperation in order to assist in the implementation of effective policies on labour migration. In addition to this, all International Labour Conventions, including the eight fundamental ones, under the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up, apply to migrant workers.

The three major international conventions on migrant workers (ILO Convention No. 97, Migration for Employment [1949], ILO Convention No. 143, Migrant Workers [Supplementary provisions] Convention [1975], and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families [1990]) can also be used as a reference point for countries to elaborate migration policies.

In the case of migrant fish workers, ILO's Work in Fishing Convention of 2007 was a landmark convention which is applicable to all types of commercial fishing and seeks to provide acceptable minimum standards that protect fishers in all aspects of their work, in what is a highly dangerous and mostly unregulated profession.

Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) between India and GCC countries

One of the major problems of labour sending countries is their inability to make the receiving countries enter into bilateral agreements for the protection of migrant workers. The current norm is to sign non-binding Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs). India currently has MoUs with all GCC countries especially focusing on the welfare of low-skilled migrant workers.

A study conducted by Piyasiri Wickramasekara (2012) indicates that MoUs signed between India and the GCC countries clarify that the individual labour contract should be drawn up between the employer and the employee in accordance with the labour laws of the country concerned. Only if an employee submits fake information about his/her skills or experience can the employer change or terminate the contract. But there is no mention of the right of the employee to redress if s/he has been cheated out of wages, or if the employer has not honored the contract terms. The absence of any credible mechanism for the settlement of disputes and access to justice is the major gap in the signing of MoUs.

He also stated in his study that domestic workers, domestic drivers, gardeners, and agricultural workers who are not covered by national labour laws in the GCC countries are among the most vulnerable categories of labourers. MoUs merely state that appropriate steps will be taken to address their problems. He says that this statement is vague and has no teeth when it comes to implementation. He further added that the MoUs should mention the categories of workers that are not covered, and what steps would be taken to protect their rights. Although migrant Indian fishers run a major part of GCC fisheries none of the MoUs mention anything about them. Even if the MoUs are successful in facilitating a fair migration regime, for the fishing sector without specific contracts or other documentation from employers, implementing provisions of MoU won't be easy. Philippines is generally considered to have much better migrant protection policies and initiatives. But the contents of those MoUs were qualitatively not much different from those of India's. Thailand also has the same story. In 2002 – 03, the Thai government signed employment cooperation with the Governments of Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar, which provided a framework for regular labour migration to Thailand from neighbouring countries. But restrictions placed by those countries of origin on the type of work that migrants can do abroad means that regular migration is far less common for fishers and domestic workers.

Regional Governing Bodies

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as a forum is yet to include labour mobility in its agenda. It is important for SAARC to take the lead on migration issues both within South Asia and outside because of the high magnitude of intra regional and out migration. The labour sending countries of the South Asia should strive to arrive at an agreement along the lines of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Declaration in the Protection and Promotion of Rights of their migrant workers. They should also set up a task force on migration to gather data on migration and evolve common policies and involve national legislations. The countries of the region are yet to harness benefits of the regional consultative processes such as the Colombo Process and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The adoption of the Work in Fishing Convention of ILO in 2007 has updated and strengthened all hitherto existing ILO instruments related to fish workers. It acknowledges fishing as the most hazardous job today and has addressed occupational safety, health and social security of fishers on board. This convention provides a very comprehensive international framework for migrant fishers' rights. Both sending as well as destination countries can use this framework as a guideline when the authorities there draft policies that affect migrant fisher population. Countries in the region should also work together in all available forums and platforms for sustainably managing their already perishing fish stock.

Major recommendations for bettering institutional frameworks regarding labour migration in India

- On the issue of fishermen in particular, concerned departments should conduct awareness campaigns at the major migrant sending coastal areas of the country on the importance of signing a contract and getting insurance coverage before emigrating and ensuring that they are honoured. The contract should also have a line saying that this agreement comes under the labour law of that particular host country. This will automatically make the migrant eligible to approach the labour court if an issue arises between him and his sponsor.
- A well structured and organised association of migrant fishers should be established in Kanyakumari and other potential migrant origin areas to take up their issues.
- Government should organize pre-departure trainings to the potential migrants. Pre-departure orientation, in fact, is the most pragmatic strategy to minimise the risks associated with temporary labour migration.
- Government should introduce a system for collecting migration data in a comprehensive manner. Fisheries department should take up a more proactive role in understanding the real issues of these people.
- There should be better co-ordination and communication between all three ministries that are dealing with emigration related cases. All three ministries should also ensure prompt and timely communication between state governments on matters/issues related to them.
- Government of India should make sure that all its missions in all major migrant destination countries have adequately trained manpower and logistics. Government should have regular consultations with overseas

missions, state governments, recruitment agencies, and other relevant stakeholders related to migration.

- Lack of access to the missions puts the migrants at risk. In order to mitigate the situation hotlines should be established in all Indian missions so that workers can register complaints on an urgent basis.
- Initiatives like IWRC¹⁵ in UAE should be established in all major destination countries. Ministries should also make sure to publicize all the migrant welfare initiatives of Government of India.
- Signing MoUs is definitively a positive development in bilateral relations between two countries. The authorities should make sure these MoUs have references to provisions of major international instruments on migrant workers. MoUs should also consider and include issues of vulnerable groups like migrant fishers.

Things to be done in the GCC countries:

- The most important thing to be done in GCC countries is to provide fishers the much needed protection by bringing them under the labour laws of Gulf Cooperation Council countries. *Kafala* system gives the employer immense power over the worker because he/she cannot leave the country or change employers without his/her consent.
- As the migrants suffer due to misdemeanors of individual kafeels under the system, the GCC countries should introduce a better sponsorship system. Host countries should also conduct routine checkups at labour camps and withholding of passports and other identity documents of employees by his/her sponsor should be considered an offense subject to appropriate penalties.

The report highlights the recruitment as well as the working and living conditions of migrant fishers in GCC countries. Despite issues in recruitment and other struggles and hardships in the host countries, GCC migration has helped the fishing community in Kanyakumari to improve their economic conditions. Compared to unskilled irregular migrant fishers on board Thai fishing vessels in South East Asia, life is much more secure and safer for these fishers in the GCC countries. With few small yet positive steps especially in areas like recruitment and treatment of workers by sponsors it is possible to make these fishers' lives

15 A Welfare Initiative of Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, GoI under the aegis of Embassy of India, aims to handle issues pertaining to the Indian workers residing in UAE.

much easier and risk free. It is high time governments and policy makers both in sending as well as host countries take initiatives to bring about greater transparency, stability and security to the life of migrant fishers who work in GCC waters.

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APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire used for interviewing migrants and their family:

Questions for migrant fishers

PROFILE

Name:

Age:

Marital status:

Education:

Name of home village:

HISTORY & PROCESS OF MIGRATION

1. In which foreign country and province are you working?
2. How long have you been working there?
3. Why did you go to that country? Did you go to any other countries in the past? If yes, how many years ago? For how long? Which country? Why did you come back?
4. What type of work you used to do before your recent migration? If it was fishing, what was your job role (skipper/crew)? How much were you earning while fishing back home?
5. How did you find the employment in the GCC country? (Through relative/friends/agents/other)
6. Type of visa you are holding and its validity
7. What did you have to do in order to go there? (Guide discussion regarding paper work required, passport stamped, and money paid to people/travel agency, medical checks, insurance, etc. Take detailed notes of responses). If you paid any money, how did you manage that?
8. Did you sign any type of contract before leaving the country?
9. Did you receive any pre-departure training?
10. Did you have any idea about the nature of work? If yes, what were you told about the nature of work?

11. Did you have any idea about the social or cultural background of the destination country? If yes, what were you told about the social or cultural background of the destination country?
12. How long is your current contract for?

PROTECTION & MIGRATION POLICIES

Did you sign any contract there? Do you have a copy of it? If not, do you know the contents of it?

Have you undergone any medical checkups there before starting the job?

Did you pay any money before starting the job? If yes how much, for what purpose and to whom?

Did you pay for any insurance there? If yes, how much?

Is your passport with you while at work?

Have you ever gone to meet any Indian missions there? If yes, for what purpose? If no, do you have any contact details of the local consulate?

Any instructions from the sponsor before starting the working? (like restrictions or warnings)

WORK AND LIFE

Fishing season in that country? Any restrictions on the kind of gear you use during certain period of the year?

Are you fishing for a sponsor or you have got your own rented boat?

Type of Boat and engine specifics, number of fishers and gear you use there? Is trawling allowed there

Do you need to sign on any paper before and after fishing trips?

What are your main catches there?

What type of fishing trips you undertake there?

Average working hours per day

Average working days per week

What is the nature of work on board? (skipper/crew/cook)

If you are a skipper, how is your relationship with you sponsor?

If you are a crew member, how is your relationship with your skipper?

How often do you receive your wages? What type of system do you follow there? (share/salary)

What is your current wage per month on an average?

How often do you send your remittance home, what kind of channels you use for that and how much do you send on an average?

How do you spend your off days there?

What do you do during fishing ban periods?

How is your relation with your sponsor? Does any local person accompany you for fishing?

Have you had any instances of fighting/argument while working there? If yes, details.

After landing, who all goes to the market for selling off the fish?

Do you think you are getting actual price for you catch?

Where do you stay in that country? (In a house /on boat itself?)

How often do you come home? How do you keep in touch with your family and how often?

How cordial is the local community there? Do you ever come under attack from them or from your kafeel/sponsor?

How is work there? How different is it from working in your homeland?

Do you need to pay any money for renewing the visa and other documents? If yes, how much?

Did you have to acquire any new skills when you were working there?

Did you introduce any new technique/technology back home?

Do you prefer fishing there or here? Why so?

SAFETY AT WORK

How safe is fishing in Gulf waters? Do you face any security issues at work?

Do you cross maritime boundaries while fishing? If yes, how often do you cross?

Have you ever been forced to cross borders by your sponsor?

Have you ever got caught?

Did you face any jail term there for crossing maritime boundaries? If yes, details (life in jail, access to legal help, sponsors attitude, Indian consulates response, attitude of other local inmates etc)

Did you ever come under the attack of pirates/criminals? If yes, details

What you do if you fall sick there? (Access to Medical care, insurance, money)

Any history of accidents while at work? If yes what did you do at the time? Did you get any insurance amount after that?

Did any of your co-worker or friends die while at work there? If yes, what did you do then? What was the procedure for sending back the body and all? Did any of his relatives receive any money from the sponsor/government?

If an accident happens whom will you contact first?

Are you happy working there? How long are you planning to work there? Would you like to come back and fish in your local area after sometime?

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FAMILY

Name:

Name of the Migrant:

Relationship with the migrant:

Are you aware of the country your husband/father/son working at and do you have contact details of the sponsor they are working for/ or any of their co workers?

Do you have photocopies of their travel documents at home?

How often do you talk to him?

How often do you receive money from him and how much on an average?

What are the purposes for which remittances are used? Did you construct any house or buy any land using his remittance?

Do you participate in any of the village/local level meetings? If yes, did you start going for meetings after his migration or even before that?

Are you part of any of the local self-help groups?

Do you feel safe when he is away?

Is there any change in your relationship with your neighbor before and after his migration?

Is there anyone to help you when you or your children fall sick?

How has his migration helped you and your family? Education/access for health services etc

Are there any problems you and your family face because of his migration?

Has he faced any problems when he is away? What problems? How did he deal with them there? Who helped you here?

ANNEXURE

TESTIMONIES

Recorded during December 2014- April 2015

All the fishers surveyed for the study had many years of experience in fishing in the Indian waters prior to their migration. But none of them were aware of the nature of the fisheries sector or fishing pattern in the GCC countries before departure. Except *gargoor* fishers interviewed had previous experience of using all gear used in GCC waters. Use of *gargoor*s was very new to all of them and it took 2 – 3 days to learn the technique of fishing with them.

VILLAGE NAME: AROKYAPURAM

Returnees

Name: Wellington

Country: Bahrain

Initially he worked for three years in Saudi Arabia and then went to Sitra in Bahrain, fished there for two years and came back after issues with the sponsor. He found the job in Saudi with the help of a relative to whom he paid INR 80,000 and for the job in Bahrain he paid INR 75,000 to a friend who helped him. He got the ECR cleared with the help of a travel agency, paying INR 4500 for its services. In Saudi he used to earn around INR 25,000 – 30,000 per month on an average. The highest amount he earned was INR 50,000. For a better income he left Saudi after three years and went to Bahrain. He used to work on tarad both in Saudi and Bahrain. But in Bahrain from day one he had issues with the skipper. He accused the sponsor of nonpayment of salary, harassment at work, emotional blackmailing etc. He used to get around INR 20,000 monthly while working in Bahrain, which was not enough for him to manage his expenses as well as send money home. He also had to pay INR 2500 monthly for insurance in addition to around INR 6000 for stay and other expenses. He was even denied leave to go home by his skipper. After two years he came home complaining of some diseases and never went back. Currently he is working in his own village and earns around INR 20,000 per month.

Name: Selvaraj

Country: Saudi Arabia

He used to work on a 56 feet long launch, with 7 – 8 crew members. He worked there for 8 years and came back due to issues with his skipper. Currently he is working as

a skipper in Kerala. He paid INR 67,000 to go to GCC for the first time. His friend helped him to get the visa. Local travel agencies arranged his ECR clearance for a charge of INR 3000. He went through Trivandrum airport. The first five years were very good. Then he changed the boat. But his new skippers used to torture and harass him while at work. He also had difficulty in getting leave. For the first five years he used to earn INR 30,000 – 40,000 monthly, but after changing the boat he used to get only INR 20,000 – 25,000. Once he got arrested in Iran and was in jail for 3 days. This happened while he was working on the first boat and his boat owner paid the fine and got the crew released. His vessel also came under attack from Iranian pirates thrice. On each occasion, they took all the instruments and money from the crew. Selvaraj's first owner used to give the entire money for buying new instruments and gear but the owner of the second boat did not. After working with the second boat owner for three years, he came home on leave and didn't go back. At present he earns around INR 25,000 per month fishing in Kerala.

Name: John

Country: Qatar

He worked in GCC for 16 years and came back home in 2012. Initially he went as a crew member to Saudi for 2 years and then moved to Qatar with the help of a friend. He didn't get any emigration clearance when he went to GCC for the first time. He bypassed emigration check by paying officials at Trivandrum airport through a local travel agency. In Qatar also he was a crew member for the first three years and then became the captain. He used to earn around INR 80,000 – 1,00,000 per month. He used to work on launches and had 6 – 7 crew members on board. He also got room to stay for free from his sponsor. He was very happy with his sponsor and never had any issue with him. He used to get return flight tickets from his sponsor whenever he came home on leave. According to him, in the initial days he used to face threats from local communities both in Saudi and Qatar. But now it has changed a lot. He noticed a decrease in fish in Qatar due to increase in the number of boats and the increase in new gear. He is very satisfied and content about his Gulf stint and is now at home.

CURRENTLY ON LEAVE

Name: Antony Britto

Country: Saudi Arabia

He is working as a fisher in Darin, Saudi Arabia on a launch for the last 8 years. He paid INR 1,50,000 to a friend to get the visa. In addition to that he also had to pay 1000 riyal (1 Saudi Riyal = approx. INR 18) to the sponsor for getting

work permit. Annually he also pays 4100 riyal for visa renewal plus insurance. They made insurance mandatory only three years ago. He has a medical insurance card but he never got any refunds from hospitals. They always declined his card. In the first five years he could earn not more than INR 1,50,000 per annum, whereas in the last three years he has got around INR 5.5 – 6 lakh. He attributes this out to the lesser number of people working on his launch these days. Earlier there used to be 7 fishers on launch and these days there is only 3. Usually they go for 5- 6 days of fishing trips. Though he has issues with the skipper, he is sticking around keeping only the earnings in mind. While on leave he goes for fishing in Kanyakumari.

Name: Sahayam

Country: Qatar

He has been working as a fisher in Qatar for 4 years. He paid INR 1,25,000 to a relative to get the visa. He works on a tarad there. He also paid emigration officials through travel agencies to get on board the flight. He does daily fishing trips and his sponsor also goes out fishing with him. He is happy about working there and he earns around 35,000 monthly. The only worry he has is the short temper of his sponsor. He spends around INR 6500 for his stay and other expenses per month.

Name: Christopher

Country: Saudi Arabia

He has been working in Saudi Arabia for the last 2 years. Previously he was in Qatar for 2 years and came back home after issues with his sponsor. He got this visa through a travel agency in Poonthura. He paid INR 60000 to a relative for his first trip to Qatar and INR 1,20,000 to a friend for Saudi visa. He sends home about INR 30,000 per month.

In Qatar he faces issues in the market and doubts whether his skipper actually records the correct amount in the weekly sale. He goes fishing even when he is on leave.

Name: Antony

Country: Saudi Arabia

He has been working in Jizan province in Saudi Arabia for the last 6 years. He paid 2.2 lakh INR for the visa and got ECR clearance through a travel agent. He works on a rented tarad. He stays at a rented house and his monthly spending amounts to INR 6500. He manages to send home around INR 70,000 per month. He works along with his brother and an uncle. He is very happy working there.

Name: Simon

Country: Bahrain

He has been working in Askar, Bahrain for 3 years. He paid INR 90,000 for the visa to a relative. He came home a month prior to the interview after getting injured while loading ice onto the boat. He got a very nominal amount from his sponsor when he went to hospital. He worked on a launch. He used to send home INR 35,000 per month while working there. He got arrested twice in Qatar and both times Qatari officials let him go after a few hours. Once he got attacked by Iran pirates inside Bahraini waters. They took all the gear, instruments, personal belongings and fish from the boat. They even attacked the captain of his boat. He is planning to go back in 15 days time. He has problems with his skipper. He goes out fishing during leave.

VILLAGE NAME: RAJAKKAMANDAL THURAI

Returnees

Name: Bennet

Country: Dubai

He returned home after just 40 days due to issues with the captain. He paid INR 1,40,000 to go there. He also got the ECR cleared with the help of local travel agents. From day one his captain started harassing him. His captain was also from Kanyakumari. He was working on a launch alongside 6 other men—all from Kanyakumari itself. According to Bennet, the captain treats the fellow workers like slaves and were often not even given enough time to have food while at work. They used to go for 5-6 days trips and in Dubai all the fishermen generally stayed on the boat itself. The captain even delayed giving shares and Bennet left the job within few days after getting his first share. He left the country by lying about his mother's health. He is now fishing in Kerala.

Name: Charles

Country: Bahrain

He returned after twelve years. Initially he was in Saudi and then shifted to Qatar after 6 years with the help of a friend. He paid INR 90,000 for the visa. He worked on a launch there for two years and then shifted to the same sponsor's tarad. He used to earn around INR 40,000 per month, His sponsor also used to go fishing with him. He got arrested twice by Iranian authorities while at work and had to spend a few weeks in jail. Both times the sponsor paid the money to get him out. After 6 years of working in both Saudi and Bahrain he came back. Though he had issues with his sponsor he was happy working there. He is now at home.

Name: Raj Sahayam

Country: Qatar

He went to Qatar after paying INR 60,000 to a relative to get his visa and paid around INR 6500 to a travel agent to get the documents ready. He was working on a launch with 7-8 people. After 3-4 months the working environment became very hard. Some of his co-workers left on leave and never came back. So there were only 4 staff and work became very difficult. He had some problems with the captain too. He also was doubtful about not getting the exact amount for the catch. They also came under attack of Iranian pirates causing huge financial loss. After eleven months in Qatar he returned to Kerala where he is now working.

ON LEAVE**Name: Silvi**

Country: Al Wakrah in Qatar

He has been working in Qatar for the last 2 years. Earlier he worked in Saudi for 7 years. For the Saudi visa he paid INR 60,000 and he shifted to Qatar in 2013 with the help of a relative. He paid INR 1,30,000 to him for the Qatar visa. He also paid emigrations officials through a travel agency to bypass emigration clearance. In Qatar he is working on a launch along with 7 – 8 people. He usually undertakes 4 – 5 days fishing trips. For renewing the visa he pays 500 riyal per year. He manages to send INR 35,000 – 40,000 home on an average every 35 – 40 days. He stays in a rented room and pays an average INR 5500 every month. He is also not happy with his skipper. In Qatar, there are fishing restrictions during April – May during which fishing is allowed for only 12 days.

Name: Sahayam

Country: Ajman, Dubai

Earlier Sahayam worked in Bahrain for 7 years and now for the past three years he has been working in Ajman, UAE. He paid INR 40,000 (one way ticket charge included) to a friend to get the visa. He paid INR 5000 to a local travel agency to get emigration clearance. After reaching there he paid 2500 dirhams to his sponsor before starting the job. He pays this amount every alternate year. He gets the share after 3 – 4 fishing trips. According to Dubai law a local fishermen has to be present on each boat while going out fishing. The local fisherman in Sahayam's boat gets a fixed salary of 3000 dirham/month. Fifty per cent of that will be given by the sponsor and the other fifty is taken from the share of the crew members. He works on a tarad and does daily trips. Sahayam had many experiences of this local man not turning up and missing out a day's

fishing trip. Sahayam gets to send on an average INR 50,000 home every month. The maximum he has sent till date is INR 70,000 and the minimum INR 23,000. He also stays on the boat like others working in Dubai. He is happy with both his skipper and sponsor. Twice he came under the attack of pirates. His rent is also paid by his sponsor.

Name: Peter

Country: Bahrain

Peter has been working in Bahrain on a launch for the last 5 years. He paid INR 90,000 five years back to a friend to get the visa. He paid emigration officials INR 4300 through a local travel agency. He is currently on leave and is in two minds whether to go back or not due to issues with his sponsor. His sponsor goes fishing with him. He works on a tarad and undertakes daily fishing trips. Earlier there was one more person along with him. But now it is only he and his sponsor. Unlike the initial years, these days the share he gets has come down due to fewer fishing trips. His earning has therefore decreased from an average of INR 45,000/month to around 30,000. He goes out fishing even during leave.

Name: Samuel

Country: Saudi

He has been working as a fisher in Darin, Saudi Arabia on a tarad for the last 6 years. He paid INR 70,000 to a relative to get the visa. His uncle himself is the captain of the tarad. He is very happy working there and he manages to send home around INR 50,000 per month. He also undertakes daily fishing trips. He doesn't remember whether he paid any money to the travel agency during the first time. He has issues with the skipper, but the payment is regular so plans to continue working there.

Name: Silvester

Country: Qatar

He has been working in Qatar on a fishing launch for the last 4 years. He paid INR 1,00,000 to a friend for getting the visa. A local travel agency got a CDC certificate for him and he didn't have to go through the emigration clearance. The average remittance he sends home is INR 30,000/month. Even though he is happy with his sponsor's attitude towards the workers and never had any issue with him, like many fishers working in Qatar he also has some doubts about his skipper on whether the amount he marks in the weekly record is correct. He is happy working there and planning to be there for at least 10 more years.

VILLAGE NAME: NEERODI**Returnees****Name: Anto**

Country: Al Wakrah in Qatar

He got the visa for Qatar for free in 2010 from a relative. That was the first time he went for fishing in a GCC country. His relative was working on a different boat in the same harbour. He paid only INR 4500 to get the emigration clearance. He was told by the local agents that though they had applied for it he didn't get it, so they would use other channels. He was working on a launch there. Initially everything was smooth. He was very happy and managed to send home on an average INR 40,000 – 50,000 per month. But after a few months his captain's attitude towards him started changing and he started harassing him. His shares got delayed and his life was made hell at work. His co-workers also shared the same problems that he did. His relative tried talking to the captain about this but in vain. After the end of his visa period, he didn't renew it and returned to Kerala where he is now working on a boat earning around INR 20,000 per month.

Name: Selarin

Country: Ras al Khaimah, UAE

He got his visa through a friend and paid only INR 6000 to a travel agency to make the travel arrangements. He got emigration clearance through them and went there in 2003. He was working on a tarad along with 3 other people. He used to work 6 days a week from 7.00 am – 7.00 pm. He was very happy working there and managed to send home around INR 50,000 – 60,000 month and worked continuously for 9 years and came back. The last three years there he was a captain. He had a very good relationship with his sponsor and is very content about his Gulf stint. He did come across Iranian pirates a few times but they never attacked him. He is now at home.

Name: Antony

Country: Al Wakrah in Qatar

He is another victim of the arrogant nature of captains. He went to Qatar in 2010 and came back after three months. He got this visa through a friend and paid him INR 60,000. He got a 3-month business visa with promises that it would get extended after that period. He was working on a launch there along with 5 – 6 people. From day one his captain started harassing him over every trivial thing. While at work one of the crew members got injured but his sponsor

didn't even give money to go to hospital. The maximum share he got while working there was INR 30,000. After 3 months he did not get his visa extended and he had to come back. Though he pleaded with his sponsor for a renewal he was not ready even to listen to him. Currently he is working in Mangalore and earns around INR 20,000/month.

ON LEAVE

Name: Joseph

Country: Dubai

Initially he worked for two years in Saudi Arabia and then went to Dubai and is working there for the last three years. For the first time he paid INR 40,000 to an agent for getting a visa to Saudi Arabia. There he had some issues with his sponsor who was least bothered about the workers under him. There he was staying at a rented house and his monthly spending was about INR 5000. He went to Dubai with the help of a friend in 2010 and is still working there on atarad. He manages to send around INR 50,000 per month to his family back home and is happy with his sponsor and skipper. An accommodation has been arranged for him free of cost. His sponsor also goes fishing with him.

Name: Christopher

Country: Bahrain

He has been working in Bahrain on a launch for the last 4 years and paid INR 95,000 four years back to a friend to get the visa. He works on a tarad there. He paid INR 25,000 for emigration clearance through a local travel agent. Initially he had some issues with his sponsor. Once he got arrested by Iranian police, and at the time his sponsor paid the money and got him out from the jail. Although he had some problems with his sponsor, he prefers working there because of better earnings for the family.

Name: Simon Antony

Country: Saudi Arabia

He has been working as a fisher in Saudi Arabia on a launch for the last 5 years. He paid INR 80,000 to a relative to get the visa. In addition to that he also had to pay 1500 riyal to the sponsor for a work permit. He earns around INR 30,000 per month and he is happy about what he is earning. But he is not at all happy about the slave like life there and his captain's attitude. He has to pay around INR 6000 for rent and other expenses. They go out for fishing 5 – 6 days

at a stretch. He faced attacks from Iranian pirates thrice and once they took away all their goods. They also fish outside Saudi waters but have never been caught.

Name: Vincent

Country: Bahrain

He is working in Bahrain for the last 7 years. He paid INR 95,000 to an agent to get the visa. He got the emigration clearance through a local travel agent for INR 4000. He is working on a launch with 6-7 co-workers. According to him, he is earning around 5 lakhs per year. Once they faced an attack from Iranian pirates, and after taking all the belongings they left the launch and workers. Now he is planning to return after one month. His intention is to work for 5 more years and then retire. Vincent is also not happy with his captain's behavior towards his workers. One of his colleagues got killed in an accident in Bahrain a few years back but he didn't receive any compensation from his kafeel.

Name: Sahayam Antony

Country: Qatar

Initially he was working in Saudi Arabia. For a better income he left Saudi and went to Qatar after three years. He went to Saudi after paying INR 65000 to get the visa. He also paid INR 1,25,000 to an agent for the second time to get a visa for Qatar. In Qatar he works on a tarad and he is earning around INR 25000 and lives in a rented house with others. He had issues with people whom he was staying with and had a fight. So he is currently in two minds whether to go back or not. He is also not happy with the price he is getting from Qatar market and his sponsors attitude towards his workers. The sponsor also goes out fishing with them.

VILLAGE NAME: ERAYMAN THURAI

Returnee

Name: Silvadimrin

Country: UAE

Before going to UAE in 2012, he worked in both Qatar and Saudi Arabia as fisherman. Initially he went to Qatar in 1999 with the help of a friend. He paid INR 50,000 then for the visa. He also used non-regular channels to bypass emigration clearance with the help of a travel agency. He worked in Qatar on a launch for 8 years and came back after he got to know his skipper was cheating

on the amount of fish they caught and the records he was maintaining. He had to pay 400-500 dirhams to renew the visa every two years. He came back in 2006 and then went to Saudi Arabia the same year with the help of a friend by paying INR 10000. He worked as a fisherman on a boat owned by Saudi Fisheries Company. But he was not getting enough work, so he came back after a few months and started working in Kanyakumari. Later in 2012 he went to UAE after paying INR 1,20,000 with the help of a relative. There he worked on a tarad. The first few months were okay but gradually it started getting bad. The boat was not fit enough to go fishing daily and it was very difficult to even manage daily expenses there. And the boat owner was not ready to even repair the boat, so he returned home after a few months and is now working as a fisherman in Kanyakumari.

Name: Tades Raj

Country: Qatar

In 2005, he went to Qatar after paying INR 55,000 to a friend and Aaso paid around 6000 INR to a travel agent to get the documents ready. He worked there till 2008. Like other people's experience in the initial years he was also happy there; he was working on a launch along with 6 people and they generally used to undertake 5 days fishing trip. Monthly they undertook around 3 – 4 trips and earned around INR 52,000 – 55,000 a month. He used to send around INR 30,000 home. After a year the amount they used to get as catch share came down and the relation with the skipper turned sour. He started harassing him and other crew members. Monthly income started coming down to as low as INR 30,000. He suspected that the skipper and his friends were cheating on the catch record they keep at market. He didn't know the language so was unable to talk to the sponsor. He paid 500 riyal every year to renew the visa while he was there. He came back in 2008 after repeatedly asking for his papers and passport. In, 2010 he again got a chance to go to GCC; this time also to Qatar and he worked on a tourist boat. But he came back in a year from there again and is now working in Kerala.

Name: James

Country: Bahrain

He worked there for 6 years and came back due to some issues with his sponsor. He had to meet all the expenses to live there. His sponsor was not approachable for the essential needs of workers under him. Even in the case of hospitalization of a worker, the sponsor used to give a very nominal amount. For getting the visa he paid INR 75000 to a relative. Now he is working in Kerala.

ON LEAVE**Name: RooseltAnto**

Country: UAE

He has been working on a tarad in Ras al Khaimah for the last 9 years. He paid only INR 20,000 to a friend in India to get the visa . But he had to pay INR 50,000 more to his kafeel before joining the job. He also undertook a medical checkup. He got a one year visa and renews it every year. He earns INR 50,000 per month on an average and he doesn't need to pay any money as room rent. Though he is happy with the money he is getting, he is not happy with the attitude of his sponsor towards him. He thinks he is having a slave like life there. They argue with each other every day since his sponsor also comes fishing with him. He also suspects that his sponsor does not maintain proper recording of the exact value of their catch. Sometimes they even cross over to Oman and catch fish there. Once they got caught but were released after a few hours. He goes fishing once in a while in Kanyakumari when he is on leave.

Name: John Kumar

Country: Dubai

He has been fishing in Qatar for the last 10 years. He paid INR 45,000 for the visa to a relative. He got the emigration clearance with the help of a travel agency for which they charged him INR 6000. He works on a tarad and earns around INR 50,000 – 60,000 per month. He is very happy with what he is earning and his sponsor also fishes with him. He stays in a rented house along with three others and pays his share of the rent. He never faced any pirate attack and never crossed any international boundary.

Name: Stephan

Country: Dubai

He has been working as a fisher in Qatar for 4 years. He paid INR 95,000 to a friend to get the visa. He works on a launch there. He also got the ECR cleared with the help of local travel agents. He is happy both with his skipper and sponsor, though he sometimes faces problems with the former. He earns around INR 40,000 per month. He goes out fishing in Kanyakumari when he is on leave.

Name: Sahayam Britto

Country: UAE

He went to UAE after paying INR 1,20,000 with the help of a relative 6 years ago. Local travel agencies arranged his ECR clearance for a charge of INR 3000.

He worked on a tarad, earning around INR 30,000 – 40,000 on an average. The highest amount he earned was 50,000. He works on the tarad along with four other people. Now he has a plan to leave this and go to Bahrain for a better opportunity with his uncle. He is not happy with what he is earning and the behavior of his sponsor. The sponsor pays for his accommodation.

Name: James

Country: Saudi Arabia

He has been working in Saudi Arabia for the last three years. Earlier he worked in UAE for 5 years. The first time he travelled there he paid INR 60,000 to get the visa; he shifted to Saudi in 2011 with the help of a relative. He paid INR 1,30,000 to him for the Saudi visa. He also paid emigrations officials through the travel agency to bypass emigration clearance. According to him, they have a better life since he started working abroad. He manages to send INR 50,000 – 60,000 per month on an average. He works on a launch. Though he is not happy with his skipper he says his sponsor is a very nice person.

VILLAGE NAME: INAYAMPUTHEN THURAI

Returnee

Name: Rexlin Raj

Country: Qatar

He was working there in a launch, along with 7 – 8 crew members. He worked there for 7 years and came back due to issues with his skipper. He paid INR 1,20,000 to a friend to get the Qatar visa. He had to undergo a medical checkup before getting the visa. For the first 4 years he was happy with his work. Then his captain started to harass him. He accused the skipper of nonpayment of salary, harassment at work, emotional blackmailing etc. He used to work there for 12 hours continuously per day. Now he is working in Kanyakumari as a skipper.

Name: Silvester

Country: Qatar

He returned home after six years. He was warned twice by the Iranian marine police and once he even got arrested. He was working on a launch. He paid INR 1,20,000 to a friend to get the Qatar visa . He was very happy working there. He used to earn around INR 30,000 – 40,000 per month. He came back due to health issues and is at home now.

Name: Sebastian

Country: Dubai

He returned to Kerala after just six months due to issues with the skipper. He paid a friend INR 90,000 for the visa. He used to earn around INR 35,000 per month. He had some issues with his captain. The skipper used to treat them as slaves. Even if the workers were physically ill, they had to work hard. He came back after working for six years. After coming back he is working in Kerala and now he is earning around INR 25,000 per month.

NOW ON LEAVE

Name: Joseph Raj

Country: Saudi Arabia

He has been working in Saudi Arabia on a fishing launch for seven years. He paid INR 60,000 to a friend for getting a visa. Average remittance he sends home is INR 35,000. He stays in a rented room and pays an average of INR 6000 every month. He is not happy with his skipper. He goes out fishing even when on leave in Kanyakumari.

Name: Ignatious

Country: Qatar

He has been working in Qatar for 8 years. He paid INR 80,000 to a relative to get his visa. He has a medical insurance card but he never got any refunds from hospitals. They always declined his card. He returned home six months back, after getting injured in an accident. He is planning to go back in a few days time. He works on a launch there and he got only INR 5000 from the sponsor when he came home due to the injury. He used to earn around INR 25,000 – 30,000 per month. For the last few weeks he has been fishing in Kanyakumari waters.

Name Churchil Antony

Country: Qatar

He went fishing in a GCC country for the first time in 2006. His relative was working on a different boat in the same harbour. He got this visa through a friend and paid him INR 70,000. Travel agencies arranged a CDC certificate for him through some channels and he bypassed the emigration procedures. He had to pay INR 6000 to the travel agency. He used to send around INR 35000 home per month. Now the amount they used to get as share has come down and the relationship with the skipper is getting worse. He plans to leave this job and go to another place for a better opportunity.

Name: Selvaraj

Country: Saudi Arabia

Initially he was in Bahrain and then shifted to Saudi Arabia after 3 years with the help of a friend. He paid INR 1,20,000 for the visa and works on a launch. Once he got arrested in Iran and was in jail for 2 days. His boat owner paid a fine and got the crew released. His vessel also came under attack from Iranian pirates twice. The sponsor is still asking them to pay back the money (what he had paid to Iranians) in bulk but they are giving it to him in installments. He is also looking for a better opportunity somewhere because of this attitude of the sponsor. He also goes fishing in Kanyakumari during leave.

Name: Anthony Sahayam

Country: Bahrain

He has been working in Bahrain for the last three years. He got his visa through a relative for a payment of INR 55,000. He is working on a tarad and his sponsor goes out fishing along with him. He is very happy about his work and earning. He sends around INR 35,000 – 45,000 per month. Before going to Bahrain he had once been to Saudi Arabia as a fishermen but he had to come back due to issues with his skipper. He stays along with other fishers in a rented place close to the harbour. He also faced problems with pirates.

VILLAGE NAME: COLACHEL

Returnees

Sahayam Joseph

Country: Saudi Arabia

Sahayam worked in Saudi Arabia for nine months and came back due to issues with his skipper. He was working on a launch. He paid INR 75,000 to a friend to go there and went there with high hopes. The initial three months was fine. He managed to send around INR 25,000 home. But in the fourth month he didn't get anything because of boat repair and in the fifth month the skipper started torturing him saying he was not good at work and did not pay any money after the fifth month. His sponsor was nowhere around to complain and with the support of some other people he got his passport back and returned to Kerala after nine months, where he is currently working.

Name: Arnold

Country: Saudi Arabia

Arnold worked on a Saudi Arabian launch and came back after seven years because of some family matters. He was very happy working there. He went with the help of his brother who was a captain there. So he didn't have to pay any amount to get the visa. He used to send around INR 30,000 per month to his family. He worked on a tarad. He was very happy with his sponsor, who used to go fishing with him once in a while and his sponsor also. He is currently fishing in Kanyakumari itself. He has come across Iranian pirates more than 3 times and once they took away all their stuff from the boat after which the crew had to replace everything.

Name: Douglas

Country: Saudi Arabia

Douglas worked in Saudi Arabia for three years and came back after he got injured while working there. He went there with the help of a friend and paid him INR 75,000. He said that though they earned money he was not happy with life there. According to him, everybody there treated them like second class citizens. He had major issues with his skipper on the launch. This combined with an injury he sustained while fishing, compelled him to return to India. His sponsor gave him only INR 5000 for the initial treatment there. He used to earn around INR 25,000 per month there. He was working on a launch there. Though he wanted to go back afterwards, his family didn't allow him.

ON LEAVE**Name: John**

Country: Qatar

John got his visa through a friend paying him INR 75,000. He also got the ECR cleared with the help of a local travel agent. He works on a launch in Qatar. He is happy both with his skipper and sponsor. He earns around INR 40,000 per month. He has been working there for the last 5 years and plans to continue for another 5 years. . He admitted getting into other countries waters for fishing, but has never been caught. He stays in a rented house with 8 other people.

Name: Xavier

Country: Bahrain

Xavier paid a relative INR 60,000 to help him get a visa. He is working on a Bahraini tarad for the last 3 years. He also bypassed the emigration officials with

the help of a local travel agency and he paid INR 7000 for this. His sponsor also goes out fishing with him and he is happy working there. Before going there he was working in Kerala. He earns around INR 40,000 per month and has no complaints about his sponsor or the share he is getting. During leave he also goes out fishing in Kanyakumari.

Name: Cyril

Country: Qatar

He is working in Qatar on a fishing launch for the last 3 years. He paid INR 80,000 to a friend for getting his visa. A local travel agency arranged his emigration clearance through some back door process. He is having major issues with his skipper for the last two years and is currently on leave for two months. He is actually thinking of not going back to Qatar and is looking for a visa to some other county. His major problem with the skipper is the share he is getting. In the first year it was very regular and good but for the last two years it has been coming down and in the last two months he didn't receive anything at all. He goes out fishing in Kanyakumari everyday now.

Name: Dennis

Country: Saudi Arabia

He has been working in Saudi Arabia for the last 7 years on a fishing launch. He initially came here with the help of a friend. He had to pay INR 55,000 at the time. He does not remember anything about the emigration clearance. He had to pay around INR 6000 to a travel agency in addition to the ticket charge for all the documents. He is working on a launch and he earns around INR 30,000 – 35,000 per month and stays with his friends in a rented house. He is happy working there and he gets some incentives from his sponsor once in a while. While on leave he sometimes goes fishing in Kanyakumari waters. He might become a captain soon.

Name: Davis

Country: Saudi Arabia

He is Dennis's friend and he has been working in Saudi Arabia for the last five years. It is through a relative he got the visa and both of them are working from the same harbour. He had to pay INR 90,000 for the visa in addition to INR 10,000 to a travel agency for the documents. He is working on a launch. But he is having issues with his skipper and is not getting his payment regularly.

His normal earning is around INR 30,000 and he is actively looking for a better option elsewhere as he is not at all happy about his life in Saudi Arabia. He is trying for a Jizan visa. He goes out fishing daily when he is on leave in India.

Interviews with families

From each selected village two mothers or spouses of migrant workers were interviewed to get an idea about the impact of migration at home. In total 7 wives and 5 mothers were interviewed. All of their husbands or sons were currently working in a GCC country as fishermen. All of them interviewed were very happy about their husbands or sons working in the GCC countries. None of them spoke about any difficulty they faced when their husbands or sons are away. One of the striking features of the fishing communities in Kanyakumari is the high level of education among women. Out of the seven migrant fishers' wives interviewed all except two have attended colleges and one of them was a post graduate. Though all of them were aware about the country in which their husbands or sons were working, none of them had any idea about whom they were working for or any other details about their life in GCC countries. Except one of the migrants' wives, none of the interviewees had copies of their husbands/sons visa or passport with them.

The only worry they shared about the migrants in GCC is the presence of Iranian pirates in the Persian Gulf waters. According to them, the number of attacks has gone up tremendously in the last few years. All of the women interviewed spoke about at least one instance of their husband or son getting attacked by pirate groups.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Focus group discussions were held in Rajakkamangalamthurai, Neerodi and Arokyapuram. During the three focus group discussions held, school teachers, village heads and the local people interviewed reflected upon the impact that fishers' migration had on the local economy and society as a whole. According to them, the major impact of gulf migration can be seen in areas like housing, education and religious institutions. Coastal areas of Kanyakumari witnessed a mini housing revolution post the 1980s. Compared to the poor housing structures of fishing communities across India, the living condition of the fishers in Kanyakumari district is generally far better. Multi-storied houses with modern amenities are a common sight in the fishing villages of Kanyakumari. Same in the case of churches; almost all churches in the coastal areas have been reconstructed or refurbished.

The educational sector has also seen a drastic change from the late 1990s. Civil society leaders link this development to the remittances sent by the migrant workers from the Gulf countries. Earlier children from the fishing community used to enroll only in government schools and those schools in the coastal areas of the district used to boast of its student strength crossing thousands. But that's no more the case; almost all the children go to private English medium schools and most of the government schools are either shut down or about to be closed down. Teachers in the area also cautioned that the financial benefits are coming at a high social cost for many families. They spoke about the increase in the number of children whose father's work abroad becoming rebels and dropping out of school.

The major need identified by village elders regarding migrant issues during the focus group discussion was the setting up of a forum for migrant fishers in Kanyakumari. Currently if any problems arise they don't know where to go and whom to approach. Different groups and NGOs try through different routes to solve the issue and most of the times the kin of those affected are unaware of the process and what to do to solve the problem.

ICSF Occasional Paper

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ICSF is an international NGO working on issues that concern fishworkers the world over. It is in status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN and is on ILO's Special List of Non-Governmental International Organizations. It also has Liaison Status with FAO. As a global network of community organizers, teachers, technicians, researchers and scientists, ICSF's activities encompass monitoring and research, exchange and training, campaigns and action, as well as communications.

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