

Providing basic infrastructure to small fishermen by establishing chilling units that are operated and maintained by women self help groups

Project prepared by:
Foundation Of Occupational Development (FOOD)
food@foodindia.org.in

I. BACKGROUND

The Tsunami has left small fishermen in the region, who rely on the sea for their livelihood, in the dark. Since the effects of the Tsunami are high on the shore than in the mid sea the most affected are the small fishermen who live in the shore and sail short distances out to the sea for fishing in country fiber-glass boats.

It has been observed that small fishermen that go out to sea are bonded to middlemen and have no alternative source of selling their catch since they need to sell the fish as soon as they return back to shore.

The project proposes to identify women self help groups and provide them with chilling containers that can be used by the small fishermen to store their catch once they return back to shore. This will enable the fishermen to find a better price for their catch by approaching outside markets without fear of the fish getting spoilt. Further the project would act as a source of income generation for the women self help groups who would charge a nominal amount from the fishermen towards storage of their catch.

II. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Our recent studies revealed that fishermen in Tamil Nadu are a community that lives in a primitive stage with no food security, totally depending on their daily catch for survival. Traditionally the fishermen community has been bonded to middlemen since they are not only buyers but also moneylenders who lend at very high rate of interest on the condition that the fishermen sell their catch only to those who have lent money. These buyers cum moneylenders buy the catch at low prices and leave very little for the fisherman to take home.

This has been the traditional practice for the past many years and the price of the catch is decided by the buyer. This is mainly because the catch is invariably brought to the shore at odd hours and the fish need to be sold within a few hours of catch. Small fishermen have no scope of storing the fish in chilling units as done by those with mechanized boats and trawlers who can keep the catch at controlled temperatures. Many of the bigger fishermen are also maintaining trucks mounted with chilling units so that once the catch reaches the shore it is immediately transfer to the truck and taken to the market. On the other hand the small fishermen have no means to transport fish even to the nearest market to sell their catch at a better price.

The other major set back for the small fishermen is that they have to return back to the shore irrespective of the size of the catch since the buyers come to the shore only at specific timings to buy the catch.

III. PROJECT

To provide a means for the community to break out of extreme hardship, poverty and bondedness and to overcome the above hurdles, as a pilot project we have proposed to identify existing women self help groups in the following villages:

- Veerapandipatnam – 1 group
- Trasepuram – 2 groups
- Culachel – 1 group
- Radhapuram – 1 group
- Tiruchendur – 1 group

The women groups would be selected from those affected by the tsunami and who have lost the earning member in their family. There will be 20 members in a self help group.

We will provide these groups with refurbished 40 tonne chilling containers of 20 to 40 feet length. The self help groups can install these chilling containers at the shore and facilitate storing of fish that is brought to the shore by small fisherman. The groups will collect 10 paise per 1 kg per day for keeping the fish in cold storage, allowing them to meet the operation and maintenance cost and also ensures the livelihood of the operators of the chilling units. The container would be divided into 2 compartments each of 20 tonne capacity. One compartment would be used for short term storage and another for long term storage.

The chilling containers will be used by small fishermen who are on country boats. They will be able to utilize the containers to store their catch either for the short term or long term. This will help them to market their catch at their convenience. The fishermen will be able to store the fish when they come to the shore and then look for the best price for their catch without having to resort to distress selling to middlemen.

Further since the fish will be available round the clock at the village itself there is scope for establishing fishing based cottage industries in the village, thus creating new areas of employment for those who live on the shore and those who are physiologically upset from the Tsunami and avoiding getting into the sea for fishing.

The fisherman can also stay for longer periods in the sea and need not hurry to come to the shore to sell their catch to the middlemen who come to the shore at specific timings only. The fishermen need not sell all their catch at one stroke instead they can hold the stock in long term storage until they get better price.

The local community can find employment in the operation and maintenance of the cold storage and also explore new avenues in producing fish based products. Small retail fish sellers can buy from the fisherman directly instead of buying from middlemen.

Around 20 families per village will be directly benefited out of this project by being involved in the operation and maintenance of the chilling containers. Further around 100 fishermen will benefit from using the chilling containers in each village.

IV. DELIVERABLES

Identifying and providing refurbished chilling containers to 6 women groups as a pilot project.

V. TIMEFRAME / TIMELINE

This project will be implemented over a period of 6 months. The various activities involved in the project are outlined below.

1. Sensitizing the community = 1 month

FOOD will organize meetings in the communities where the pilot project is to be implemented. FOOD's team will explain to the community about the project and its benefits. Reactions from the community will be noted and answers to issues that they raise will be provided. FOOD's team will gauge the receptiveness of the community to the project and based on this proceed to shortlist women groups for the pilot project.

2. Identification of women groups = 1 month

FOOD will shortlist women self help groups comprising around 20 members each from the villages. The criteria for short-listing these groups will be to ensure that they are comprised of women that have been affected by the tsunami and have lost the earning member of their family.

3. Training and orientation programs = 1 month

Training will be provided to the women groups on day-to-day operation and maintenance of the chilling containers. FOOD will appoint specialists to provide the training on operation and maintenance of the chilling containers. FOOD's team will provide training to the groups on business skills such as maintaining daily accounts, managing customers etc.

4. Provision of chilling units = 2 months

FOOD has identified forwarding agents in Tuticorin port that are prepared to provide refurbished chilling containers at a reasonable price. These containers will be transported to the respective villages and installed by specialists appointed by FOOD. Each chilling container will be of 40 tonne capacity and they will be divided into two compartments of 20 tonnes each. Each container is capable of storing approximately 40000 kgs of fish. The containers will be insured with an insurance company against flood, riots and fire. FOOD will also tie-up air-conditioning maintenance companies to these units for ongoing annual maintenance of the chilling units.