

FISH MARKETING IN KANYAKUMARI

Report on work undertaken in India in
collaboration with the Kanyakumari
District Fishermen's Sangams Federation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Kanyakumari District Fishermen's Sangams Federation (KDFSF), an organisation of village level co-operative societies, approached the ODA Post-Harvest Project of the Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP) for assistance with fish marketing. Already selling export fish direct to processing companies, and organising auctions at fish landings, the organisation was looking for new ways to improve the incomes of its membership.

An NRI economist was asked to work with the KDFSF during a five week period. She was asked to identify existing market systems (and associated consumer requirements) and to comment on the economic and logistical feasibility of a greater marketing role for the KDFSF.

Five market systems were identified: export marketing; high value table fish (perch, snapper, seer, pomfret) sent by well-organised merchants to major urban markets; opportunistic marketing by small-scale local merchants with transport, and the flexibility to take advantage of localised (in Kanyakumari and Kerala) fluctuations in market conditions; marketing in the immediate hinterland by cycle vendors and women; and marketing of traditionally processed fish. Within Kerala and Kanyakumari, tuna is eaten widely, along with anchovy and sardines. Most of the dried fish is anchovy and ribbonfish, supplying distant markets in India.

Although there is a widely held belief by fishermen that most money can be made by sending fresh fish to major urban markets, it was concluded that the financing and managerial requirements of such an operation would be beyond the capability of the organisation at the moment. Local marketing would not appear to offer significant prospects for financial gain: existing women and cycle vendors operate on very low margins. (Nor would it be desirable to displace this low income group). The marketing of processed fish appears to offer scope for improvements in product quality, and marketing in major wholesale markets. Moreover, the inherent risk in this would be less because of the longer shelf life of the product.

Recommendations are therefore made in respect of marketing expertise, processed products, and iced fish. KDFSF should employ a marketing officer to oversee marketing activities. Production and marketing trials are recommended on new anchovy products, with the assistance of BOBP and the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology. Higher prices for processed fish could probably be secured if markets are researched before sale, and fish sold at wholesale markets rather than to visiting merchants in the fishing villages.

Prospects for replicability with other fishing groups are particularly interesting if these initiatives are successful.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

BOBP	Bay of Bengal Programme
KDFSF	Kanyakumari District Fishermen's Sangams Federation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRI	Natural Resources Institute
ODA	Overseas Development Administration of the Government of the United Kingdom
Rs	Rupees (UK£1 equal to approximately Rs27)
SIFFS	South Indian Federation of Fishermen's Sangams

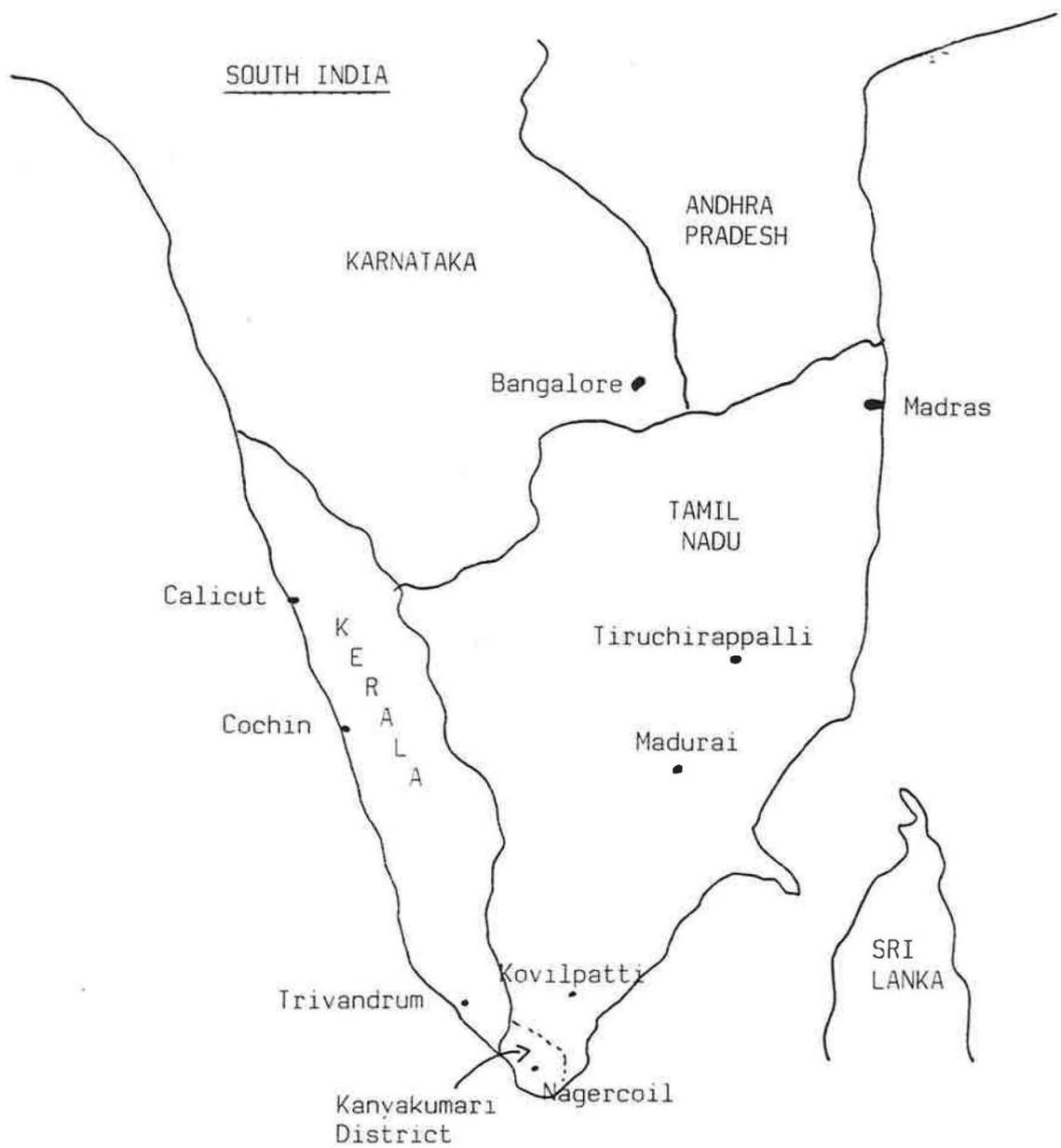
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MAP TO SHOW KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT AND MARKETING HINTERLAND



Approximate Scale 0 100 200
Kilometres

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

The Kanyakumari District Fishermen's Sangams Federation (KDFSF), an organisation of fishermen's co-operative societies in southern India, approached the Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP) Post-harvest Fisheries Project for assistance with fish marketing. In response to this request, an economist from the Natural Resources Institute (NRI), in the UK, worked with the KDFSF for a five week period in late 1989.

1.2 Terms of reference

- (a) Undertake a study of market systems for fish landed in Kanyakumari District
- (b) Identify consumer requirements/preferences in relevant markets
- (c) Comment on the economic and logistical feasibility of the KDFSF playing a greater role in marketing, to the financial benefit of its membership
- (d) Additionally, investigate the benefits from icing fish from the time of capture.

1.3 Kanyakumari District Fishermen's Sangams Federation

The first fishermen's sangams were formed in Kanyakumari District in 1973, largely at the instigation of the Catholic Church. The KDFSF was formally established in 1982, taking over the co-ordinating role previously played by the Church. Its membership comprises 30 village level societies, representing approximately 2,500 fishing families or 12.5% of the fishing population in Kanyakumari District.

The activities of the KDFSF are social (education, savings schemes), commercial (commission earned on fish auctioned at the beach, and on fish sold to export companies), and political (lobbying, to a certain extent through the South Indian Federation of Fishermen's Sangams, SIFFS, an apex organisation for sangam federations in Tamil Nadu and Kerala). The Federation's activities are financed through commission earned on fish sales, and through donor support. KDFSF is run on a democratic basis, with decisions taken by a committee of elected representatives from member sangams.

The KDFSF now wishes to consider the feasibility/desirability of expanding its role in domestic fish marketing.

2. MARKET SYSTEMS FOR FISH FROM KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

2.1 Fish production in Kanyakumari District

There are about 120,000 fisherfolk in Kanyakumari District (roughly 8% of the district population). They live in 40-50 fishing villages along a very densely populated stretch of the coast at the very tip of India. (Fishing population per kilometre of coastline is roughly the same as for Madras District). Fishing is artisanal in nature and mainly conducted from unmechanised catamarans (a local craft made of stitched planks) during short trips.

Annual production of fish in Kanyakumari District is approximately 50,000 tonnes--about 15% of the total for Tamil Nadu. The most important commercial fish are prawn, lobster, cuttlefish and squid (all for export), and tuna, anchovy, seer, sardine, ribbon fish, snapper, perch, lactarius, mackerel, garfish, vattai and Kozhiyali (local names). The district is renowned for landings of large table fish. The table below summarises the main features of the fishing year.

Table 1. Fish Production in Kanyakumari District:
KDFS/SIFFS survey of 10 fishing centres 1988/89

	Value of catch Rs million	Export species % of value	Total catch volume (tonnes)	Important non-export fish (and % of non-export value)					
August	2.8	16	512	A	T	S	R	Se	79
September	2.7	25	1,426	A	T	L	Se	K	75
October	3.1	36	1,494	T	A	Se	K	S	65
November	2.5	16	425	T	Sn	A	Se	K	50
December	2.5	8	298	Sn	T	V	P	K	53
January	2.4	4	244	K	Sn	V	T	P	52
February	2.7	n/a	279				n/a		
March	2.9	n/a	314				n/a		
April	2.4	n/a	244				n/a		
May	3.2	n/a	220				n/a		
June	5.7	n/a	231				n/a		
July	n/a	n/a	n/a				n/a		

Notes: A...anchovy
V...vattai (local name)
S...sardine
R...ribbon fish
L...lactarius
K...kozhiyalai (local name)
Sn...snapper
T...tuna
P...perch
Se...seer
n/a...not available

2.2 Market systems

The following fish market systems were identified (figures in parentheses refer to the approximate percentage of catch volume):

- | | | |
|-----|--|-------|
| (a) | Export fish | (2%) |
| (b) | High value fish, major urban markets | (5%) |
| (c) | Fish for major local (Kerala) markets | (5%) |
| (d) | Cycle vendors, fish for immediate hinterland | (40%) |
| (e) | "Headloaders" (women), fish for nearby markets | (40%) |
| (f) | Traditionally processed fish | (48%) |

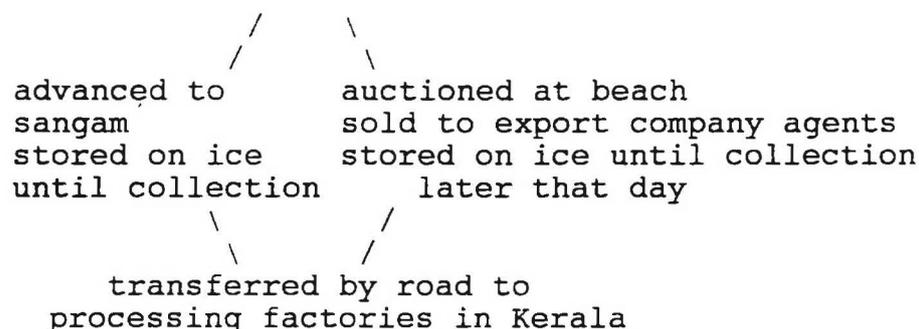
All of these systems, except some of the fish for export and processing, involve an initial beach auction at the time of landing. Where fishermen belong to a sangam, a representative of the sangam acts as auctioneer, and the commission (about 5%) is used to fund other activities.

2.2.1 Export Fish

Table 1 suggests that this trade accounted for 18% of the value of fish landings between August 1988 and January 1989. These fish are destined for processing factories in Kerala--usually transferred on ice by road, in vehicles owned or contracted by the processing plant. At the landing, agents store export fish on ice, until collection at an appointed time. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Marketing of export fish in Kanyakumari District

LOBSTER, SQUID, PRAWN, CUTTLEFISH



Advantages of sangam intervention:

- (1) sangam receives agent's commission
- (2) bulk sales strengthen bargaining position
- (3) direct contact with export company(s)

Over-capacity in the the export sector, the proliferation of companies involved and hence degree of competition, the allegedly more desirable larger fish caught off Kanyakumari, and the transparency of the system, have enabled fishermen's groups to negotiate better prices. KDFSFS societies effectively act as agents for export companies, but readily switch companies if dissatisfied with prices received. 5% of revenue is retained by the sangam.

At centres without sangams, local representatives of export companies buy fish at the beach auction, unless supplied directly by a fisherman to whom a loan has been advanced (a practice now much more common in Kerala than in Kanyakumari, thanks to the efforts of the sangam societies).

2.2.2 High value fish sent to major urban markets

In Kanyakumari, this trade is dominated by one merchant, supplied by agents at most major landings (see Figure 2). Large table fish (seer, pomfret, perch) are sent on ice to major transit or terminal markets in Madras, Bangalore, Tiruchirapalli, Madurai, and more locally in Kerala. A fleet of 4 trucks typically transports 4-6 tonnes per day (occasionally 8-10 tonnes). Fish is also sent by train. Market information is obtained by telephone or telex, and fish sold, on a commission basis, through wholesalers in other cities.

Figure 2. High value fish sent to urban markets

POPULAR LARGE TABLE FISH

||
bought at beach auction, A.M. or P.M.
by agent who receives commission

||
merchant's truck collects fish
soon after auction, transferred
to plant for packing on ice

||
distributed same day by road or train to
terminal/transit markets in southern India

In addition to the one merchant operating all year round, during the main seer season (September, October), merchants who specialise in seer, may purchase and send it by road or rail to major south Indian markets (particularly the market in Trivandrum and Madras).

Although the overall volume of fish involved (2,000-3,000 tonnes per year) is only about 5% of annual production, the high value of these species means that this trade probably represents at least 20% of catch value.

2.2.3 Fish distributed to major local markets

Another market channel for fresh fish, is through several smaller-scale merchants, who buy from one or more landings, and transport fish almost immediately by road to local markets in Kanyakumari or southern Kerala. These people will trade a mixture of fish, including locally popular tuna. Sometimes they buy fish in Kerala and sell it in

Kanyakumari. This practice, and selling in markets where women and cycle vendors operate, has caused much resentment among the latter groups. Their mobility, and working capital, permit them to take advantage of localised favourable prices, enabling them to undercut regular suppliers. The percentage of catch volume distributed through this channel is approximately 5%.

2.2.4 Cycle vendors and "headloaders"

Cycle loaders (always men) and women "headloaders" are the main source of supply for most local retail markets. Together they account for about 40% of the volume of fish landed in the district. They trade small volumes of fish, buying at beach auctions daily, and transporting the fish immediately to markets generally not more than 30 kilometres away. Here they supply retailers, or retail the fish themselves. The women reach local markets by bus or on foot. No ice is used unless there is fish remaining at the end of the day. They trade predominantly low value fish--not being able to afford the higher value fish sent out of the district. Margins on this type of operation are extremely low. It represents employment of the "last resort" with low set-up and operating costs.

2.2.5 Traditional fish processing

About 50% of the volume of fish landed in Kanyakumari is processed traditionally (dried, dry salted, or wet salted)--mostly by fishing families. The fish used in this way are essentially low value fish landed in large quantities: mainly anchovy and ribbonfish. After processing, fish is sold to cured fish merchants, who buy direct from fishing communities. Most of this fish is then sold through wholesale markets in Kerala, Kovilpatti (southern Tamil Nadu), and Madras. Some communities have been more proactive in marketing, arranging transport and selling the fish at markets out of the area.

2.3 Consumer Requirements

2.3.1 Export market: frozen products

Virtually all the lobster, prawn, cuttlefish and squid is sold to export companies, who require that it is stored on ice soon after landing. Although there is an export market for other types of fish (for instance pomfret in the Gulf), Kanyakumari does not appear to serve this trade. The value of these commodities ensures that export fish are generally better handled.

2.3.2 Major urban markets in southern India: fresh fish

Outside of coastal areas fish is not consumed in large quantities. In major cities, high income groups prefer large table fish. Snapper, perch, pomfret and seer are sold more easily, though low value fish such as mackerel and sardines may find a ready market. In inland areas, perishability, low value, and transport, limits the availability of fresh fish outside of major urban areas.

2.3.3 Local markets in Kanyakumari/Kerala: fresh fish

As a proportion of catch value these markets are the most important to the fishing communities of Kanyakumari. In the densely populated coastal areas fish is eaten daily, and this is the only part of India where tuna, caught in large quantities locally, has gained widespread acceptance. Fresh un-iced fish is preferred. Sardines, lesser sardines, ribbonfish and anchovy are the cheaper, widely consumed fish, though higher value table fish are also important.

2.3.4 Domestic markets for traditionally processed fish

In terms of volume, dried anchovy and ribbon fish are the most important cured fish. These long shelf life products are distributed through complicated networks of dried fish merchants, to the most remote inland parts of India, finding a large dispersed market among low income groups in urban and rural areas. In certain areas, there are markets for speciality products: for instance brined ray finds a market in the hilly regions of inland Kerala.

Prices paid for dried fish products depend on fish type, sand content, and quality of drying. Whilst traders will discount for excessive sand, anchovy dried on the sand is said to have a desirable mildly cured flavour. Anchovy caught with shore seines are preferred to gill net anchovy, which tend to lose their heads.

2.3.5 Export markets for dried fish products

In the past, dried anchovy was exported to Sri Lanka, but Thailand now dominates this trade with the export of high quality (sand free) anchovy.

2.4 Use of ice

Currently Kanyakumari fishermen do not ice fish (because they make short fishing trips, and it would be difficult to carry an ice box on a catamaran).

Export fish, and high value fish being sent to distant domestic markets, are generally iced immediately after auction. In inland city markets, the use of ice is expected and carries no price penalty. High income groups will pay higher prices for well-presented, quality fish.

Locally, however, iced fish has a negative image: it is considered "old" (yesterday's catch); or is associated with merchants trying to sell large volumes of fish (often from Kerala); some people say it has a poor taste (which could mean it is already spoilt); and women and cycle vendors serving the local market consider its use entirely unnecessary, since they retail fish before it spoils.

3. A MARKETING ROLE FOR THE KDFSF

3.1 Why does the KDFSF want to increase its marketing role?

Before considering a marketing role for the KDFSF, we should look more closely at the reasons for KDFSF's interest in this. These can be summarised as follows:

- * concern over daily/seasonal price fluctuations
- * difficulty in marketing seasonally large (glut) catches of anchovy (and sometimes ribbon fish), when rain prevents processing
- * widespread complaint that traditional fish drying is now curtailed by lack of space, as fishing communities have grown
- * widely held view that fish merchants could afford to pay higher prices for fish
- * incidences of collusion between fish merchants, apparently to depress prices
- * fishermen feel that their position would be stronger if they knew more about how their catch is marketed
- * sometimes, in an attempt to weaken the sangams, allegedly higher fish prices are paid to non-members
- * various unsuccessful attempts by the fishing communities to break into the fish trade (resulting in marketing difficulties, or lower prices).

An important point to note, is that sangam members are not in debt to fish merchants (this is a requirement of the KDFSF). Indebted fishermen are often obliged to sell catch to the creditor or his choice of merchant, at 20-30% below the auction prices, in addition to paying an interest charge of 5-10% of catch¹.

The KDFSF has commissioned this study, in order to assess whether a more pro-active role in marketing, could result in higher incomes for its membership.

3.2 What are the marketing options?

In moving into marketing for the first time, it is probably too ambitious to consider developing new markets. That aside, then, means that KDFSF must look to the existing market outlets, which were described in the previous section.

¹ "Interlinkage of credit, labour and marketing--relations in traditional marine fishing: the case of Purakkad (Kerala)" by J Ph Plateau, J Murickan, and E Delbar. September 1981. Cahiers de la Faculte des Sciences Economiques et Sociales de Namur.

Consider each channel in turn:

- * export marketing: the sangams already sell direct to export companies, and are not interested (sensibly) in any further vertical integration
- * domestic marketing of high value table fish: this is the area most attractive to the sangams, since they believe that this is where most money can be made
- * marketing in Kerala and Kanyakumari, taking advantage of localised variations in catch and prices
- * marketing in the immediate hinterland, currently the domain of women and cycle vendors, operating on very small margins--intervention here is unlikely to result in higher incomes for fishermen (nor is it desirable to displace this group, already squeezed by increased commercialisation of the fishery)
- * marketing of processed fish--another area in which the fishermen are very conscious of the low prices received.

3.2.1 Domestic marketing of high value table fish

In order to assess potential for intervention, the characteristics of this type of business are described.

- * capital investment in transport, packing, storage, and office space
- * large amounts of working capital required
- * good communications and contacts, enabling flexible response to market conditions
- * established commercial relationship with transport/ice companies, and therefore priority treatment at times of unexpected need for transport or ice (possibly preferential pricing too)
- * network of commission-earning agents at beach landings
- * market expertise: having the contacts or the experience to gauge where, when, and how much to send to different markets
- * trusting/long-standing relationships with commission agents in wholesale markets often dominated by a small number of commission agents--commission agent frequently "contracts" not to buy from another supplier in the same area

- * buying fish at the landings, whilst not knowing the price that it will be sold at 1-2 days later-- requires skill and an ability to absorb short-run losses
- * sufficiently important supplier for the commission agent to treat him well (prices, payment, willingness to sell)
- * sufficiently important and stable for the beach agent to be keen and loyal in fish purchases
- * would expect long-run profit-maximising behaviour suggesting that a different marketing strategy (e.g., directly supplying a terminal market and by-passing a transit market) is unlikely to result in higher profits; likewise, costs probably minimised subject to certain constraints
- * most important merchant in Kanyakumari handles 4-6 tonnes per day, runs four trucks, employs 80 people and commands a good reputation in the trade--demonstrating considerable management expertise
- * existing merchants have allegedly prevented the entry of new merchants, by pushing up beach prices until the newcomer leaves, then reverting to normal purchasing behaviour
- * although it was impossible to assess this in the time available, these factors would suggest that the market is not perfectly competitive and that a skilled merchant could extract "super-normal" profits
- * information on seer sent to Bangalore suggested that the beach price paid may be as much as 66% of the wholesaler-to-retailer price, though a fish merchant in Madras considered that the beach price was unlikely to be more than 50% of the wholesale price; information on this would require detailed study since daily fluctuations, and product differences make it difficult to assess the "typical" situation

In summary, the requirements of this type of business relate to product supply, capital, and management. Fish supply must be timely, reliable, of the appropriate volume and quality, and consistent. Capital is needed for initial investment, and to cover high operating costs (including losses). The importance of expert management and marketing expertise cannot be over-stressed (noting particularly the need to purchase at prices that reflect market conditions). Moreover, establishing a foothold in the trade is likely to be difficult (and loss generating).

Taking over the role played by the merchants would pose particular problems for a fishermen's group. Finance is likely to be a problem, given high start-up costs and operating costs, but little or no initial operating profit. The organisation would be under pressure from its membership to buy up (unmarketable) glut catches and to guarantee prices. Moreover, there would be pressure to return profits to its membership, without allowing an adequate contingency to cover losses. There is also likely to be a resistance to pay for competent management expertise, particularly on a commission basis. It is hard to see how such a marketing venture could succeed, given such initial vulnerability (high beach prices, higher input costs relative to established merchants, probably lower per unit gross revenue, and all the initial "learning the trade" mistakes).

These issues were fully debated with KDFSFS's membership during a public meeting at the end of consultant's visit. The occasion generated lively discussion, which only served to underline the pertinence of the issues raised. Some of the community leaders recognised that a marketing initiative would be under pressure from the sangam membership to adopt commercially unviable practices. There followed a lively debate with those fishermen present who contended that, indeed, prices should be guaranteed and glut catches purchased.

3.2.2 Marketing in Kerala and Kanyakumari

Opportunistic fish trading by people with transport, and the flexibility to respond to local variations in market conditions, is unlikely to serve the interests of the fishing communities. This trade is essentially irregular, and unlikely to offer scope for a sustained positive impact on fishing incomes.

In terms of the volume of fish handled, the trade by women and cycle loaders is much more important. Since they compete for fish purchases at the beach auctions, and operate on very low margins, serving small dispersed markets, it is unlikely that any intervention here would serve the interests of the fishing communities.

3.2.3 Marketing of traditionally processed fish

The other important outlet for fish produced in Kanyakumari is the domestic market for traditionally processed fish. KDFSFS/SIFFS data indicate that about 50% of the fish catch serves this market. At the moment most of this is sold through merchants visiting fishing communities and making direct purchases.

There are several reasons why there would appear to be scope for intervention here:

- * processed products have a longer shelf-life; their handling is therefore inherently less risky

- * there may be scope for improvements in product quality and the production of specialty products for particular markets, and
- * the marketing experience of the fishing community at Manakudy has been very encouraging.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Strengths and weaknesses of the KDFSF

The achievements of the KDFSF are impressive and probably unique within the artisanal fishing sector in India. The organisation appears to be genuinely popular, and has made interventions welcomed by the communities it serves (particularly with regard to fish auctions and export sales, and in the area of savings and education). However, these advances were not easily made, and the organisation still faces many challenges. These points are covered below.

4.1.1 Strengths

- * successful fishermen's organisation
- * export fish marketing
- * control of beach auction
- * savings schemes/breaking cycle of indebtedness
- * education programme
- * lobby for artisanal fisherfolk
- * grass roots, popular, decisions by committee
- * interface with other organisations/donors

4.1.2 Weaknesses

- * rivalries with other groups and villages, and within same group
- * continued attempts by private merchants to undermine sangams
- * sometimes poor book-keeping at village level, and debt control at auctions
- * KDFSF under-resourced
- * KDFSF could not function in current form without donor support
- * still a relatively young and inexperienced organisation

4.2 Fresh fish marketing

Of the existing marketing systems, it is the marketing of high value fish in major urban markets that is most attractive to the fishing communities. However, the conclusion of this study is that it would be unrealistic to expect the organisation to survive the difficult start-up period. Moreover, even if it were possible to stay the course until profits were realised, it is not clear that overall this would have a significant effect on fishing incomes. (An estimated 20% of fishing income currently comes from this source: it would therefore only be possible to effect change on a proportion of the catch marketed, and in order to pay fishermen more, it would have to be true that existing merchants do extract super-normal profits, and the KDFSF would not absorb these in higher per unit marketing costs.)

A further consideration, is that if KDFSFS were too closely associated with a loss-making marketing venture, this is likely to cause disenchantment amongst its membership, which would in turn jeopardise its considerable achievements to date.

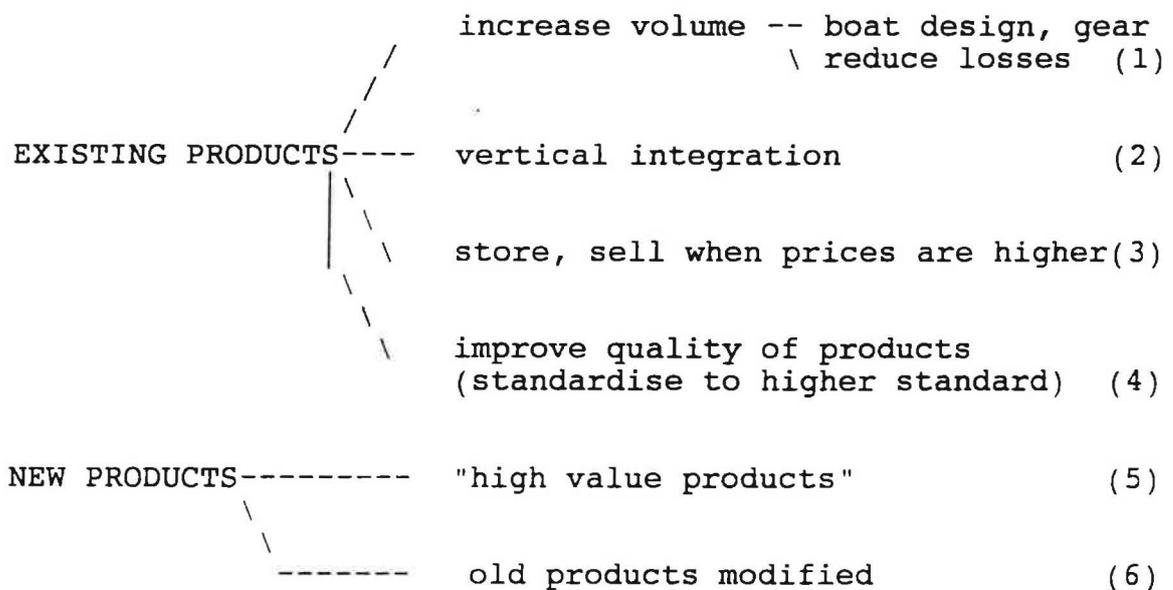
4.3 Processed fish marketing

In contrast to the conclusions above, processed fish may offer scope for co-operative marketing action, through improvements in product quality, and investigating direct sales through wholesale markets (rather than selling to merchants visiting the village). This might lead to greater price uncertainty than with current arrangements, but should permit an average increase in net income. (Fishermen in Manakudy are convinced that they have improved their economic position as a result of such initiatives).

4.4. Other ways to improve fishing incomes

The figure below summarises the options for improving incomes:

Figure 3. Options for increasing fishing incomes



All but option (1) are essentially marketing related. Options (2), (4), and (6) would be aspects of a fish processing initiative. Option (5), the production of high value products, though attractive, is risky and certainly too ambitious for the KDFSf. The only option then that has not been discussed is (3)--storage of fresh fish.

Overnight storage of fresh fish on ice may offer scope for increased income, when fish prices are exceptionally low at the time of landing. However, the perishable nature of the product could lead to a price penalty if fish is perceived to be "old". This needs to be approached cautiously, with perhaps an initially small investment in insulated boxes, for storage and marketing trials.

4.5 Recommendations

4.5.1 KDFSf employ a marketing officer

As a first step KDFSf should employ a fish marketing expert, who would oversee new marketing activities. Appendix 1 gives a draft job description for this post.

4.5.2 Marketing of processed fish

It is recommended that the KDFSf investigate possible improvements in the marketing of processed fish, by

- * standardising dried, salted products to a uniform high standard
- * selling fish directly in wholesale markets, after researching the market conditions prevailing at the time, and
- * learning from the positive marketing experiences of Manakudy sangam

4.5.3 Anchovy trials

A series of production and marketing trials on processed anchovy is recommended. This would involve the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (based at Cochin) and BOBP. Trial products suggested are:

- * iced anchovy, to be marketed outside the immediate hinterland (where fresh, uniced anchovy is widely consumed)
- * dried anchovy in retail packaging (plastic bags)
- * improved drying to reduce sand content
- * anchovy pickles, and
- * a dried brined product (anchovy put in brine if weather conditions do not permit drying)

Upon completion of trials, each product should be assessed, with most importance given to financial implications.

4.5.4 Overnight storage on ice

Although there is a widely held view amongst fishermen that any delay in sale will result in spoilage (or perception of spoilage) and a price penalty, it is recommended that KDFSFS undertake some storage trials. A fairly small investment in insulated containers would be needed in order to monitor the effect of overnight storage on prices, on occasions when the market has been particularly weak at the time of landing.

4.5.5 Premium iced fish

Locally, the prospects of securing price premia for quality iced fish are not good: iced fish is considered an inferior product. People purchasing fish at the beach prefer uniced fish since iced fish is assumed to be "old". Fish sent to other areas is iced immediately after purchase at the beach, and consumers in distant markets are used to iced fish.

If it were possible to ice fish at sea, there may be scope for sending small quantities of a premium iced product (high value table fish) to high income urban centres. For easy recognition, this product would need to be packed distinctively and well. Rail transport could be used. There was some suggestion in Bangalore that the price premium for such a product there might be 10-20%.

If the problem of icing fish at sea can be overcome (and this may be difficult where catamarans are concerned), KDFSFS should investigate the existence of this specialist market, and the feasibility of KDFSFS participating in it.

4.6 **Distribution of benefits and replicability: discussion**

The main beneficiaries of the initiatives described here, if successful, would be the fishing communities. Additionally, if seasonal losses of anchovy are reduced, there would be some benefit to consumers of dried anchovy (which would include low income groups).

The prospects for replicability are particularly interesting. If these initiatives were seen to succeed, they would provide a boost to sangam membership--which would not only increase the scope of benefits, but would also (probably) enable marketing functions to be carried out more effectively by the KDFSFS.

Looking outside the district, there are other sangam federations (under the SIFFS umbrella) in southern India--none of which are as strong as the KDFSFS. There are also attempts to start fishermen's groups elsewhere in India. Even without an expansion of its role, the KDFSFS appears to have been very successful in its efforts to improve the socio-economic status of its membership, and it might usefully serve as a model for other grass roots organisations in the sub-continent².

2 The KDFSFS is one of several organisations which are currently the subject of a study by the Overseas Development

APPENDIX 1

Draft job description for KDFSF fish marketing officer

A fishermen's organisation in Kanyakumari has a vacancy for a Tamil-speaking marketing officer who will work with its membership on the marketing of fresh and traditionally processed fish in India. The organisation, which represents some 15,000 fisherfolk, is committed to improving the incomes of its membership. The fishermen play an active role in all decisions taken the organisation.

The work will initially involve market research, and later a supervisory/co-ordination role in marketing activities. As such, the officer will become familiar with the fish products currently or potentially produced in the district (with attention to species, size, quality, and processed product form), and match these with market requirements, probably in south India. He will need to collect market specific information on prices, volumes, seasonal variations, quality standards and preferences, applicable regulations, and appropriate packing and transportation. An ability to establish and later work with trade contacts is of paramount importance, as is a proven track record in fish marketing and associated financial management.

At the same time, the nature of the organisation requires that the officer be prepared to work in an open manner with the fishing communities. He will need to contribute marketing and management expertise, as well as imagination, to their efforts to resolve the marketing constraints they face. It is also essential that he be prepared to work with other people in the organisation, to strengthen their skills and expertise in this area.

Salary, presumably fixed, not commission.