

Unlocking Opportunities: Market Access and Fair Trade for Sustainable Fisheries**¹Paramasivam Pugazhenth, ²Aatepogu Revathi, ^{3*}Chandran Sudhan**¹Research Scholar, Fisheries College and Research Institute, Thoothukudi – 628001²Research Scholar, Andhra Pradesh Fisheries University, Muthukur, Nellore -524001^{3*}Assistant Professor, Department of Fisheries Resource Management, TNJFU

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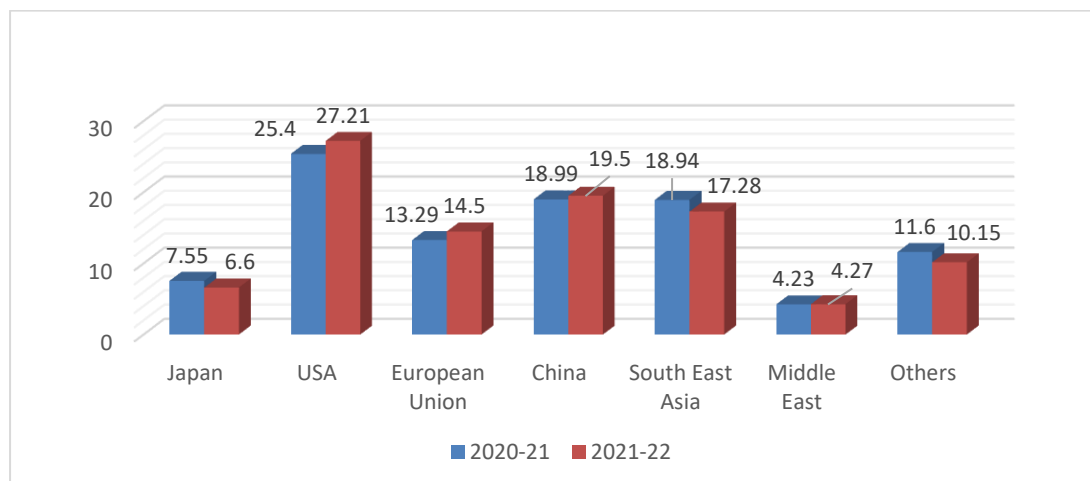
[DOI:10.5281/FishWorld.14861012](https://doi.org/10.5281/FishWorld.14861012)*Abstract*

This article explores the challenges and opportunities in enhancing market access and promoting fair trade for sustainable fisheries. Fish farmers face significant obstacles such as inadequate infrastructure, market volatility, high transaction costs, and a lack of awareness regarding certification standards. These barriers hinder their ability to connect directly with consumers and secure fair prices. By strengthening producer organizations, adopting certification schemes, and leveraging digital platforms, farmers can overcome these challenges and access new markets. Fair trade practices not only ensure better economic conditions and labor rights for fishers but also promote sustainable fishing methods and environmental conservation. The article highlights key strategies for improving market access, reducing reliance on intermediaries, and empowering fish farmers to secure better income and market positioning. Through these efforts, the fisheries sector can achieve long-term sustainability, community empowerment, and economic stability.

Key words: Market Access, Fair Trade, Certification standards, Producer organisations.**Introduction**

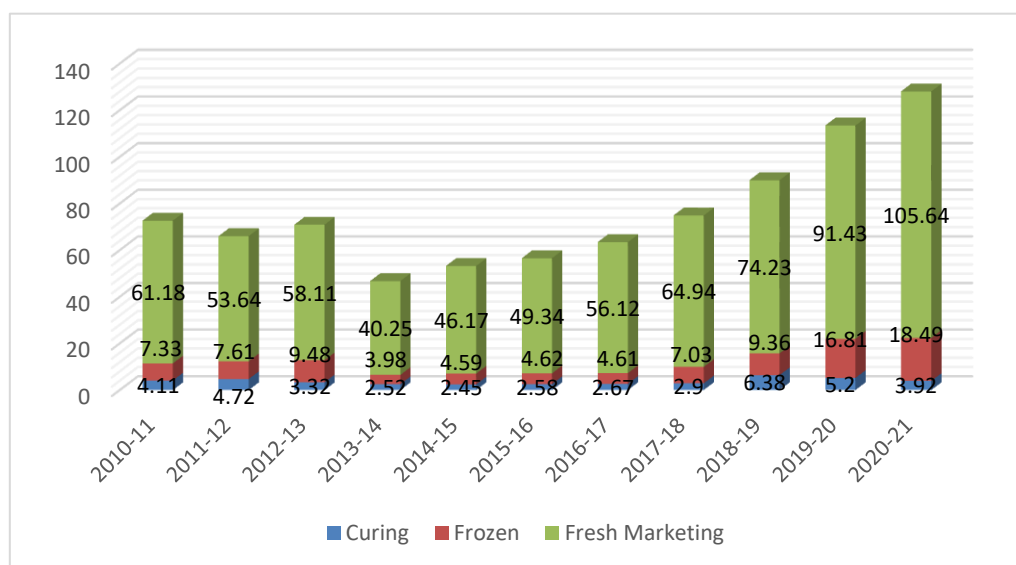
Global commerce in fisheries and aquaculture has expanded significantly, connecting markets worldwide and offering fish farmers access to new opportunities. Liberalized trade policies, innovations in logistics, and economic interdependence have fueled demand, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where urbanization and rising incomes are reshaping food preferences. In 2020, global exports of aquatic products reached 59.8 million tonnes, valued at USD 151 billion, contributing 11% to farm exports and 1% to merchandise trade. For nations like the Maldives and Iceland, aquatic exports exceed 40% of trade, emphasizing their economic importance. Amid challenges like market volatility and intermediaries, fair trade and enhanced market access are vital for financial stability, equitable pricing, and the sustainable growth of the fisheries sector.

Fig.1 Market-wise percentage share of fish exports in India Quantity (Handbook on fisheries statistic, 2023)



The data reveals notable trends in the export of Indian fish and aquatic products to global markets. Key markets like the USA, China, and the European Union have grown, reflecting strong demand and significant market access for Indian exports. This increase is encouraging for Indian fish farmers, as it supports the economic benefits of broad international market reach. In contrast, exports to Japan and Southeast Asia have declined, suggesting possible challenges or shifts in market preferences that could impact Indian exporters. Meanwhile, demand from the Middle East remains stable, providing a consistent, albeit smaller, market for Indian products. Overall, this data highlights the importance of market access and fair trade in securing reliable income for Indian fish farmers, emphasizing the need to maintain and expand opportunities in diverse international markets to support sector stability and resilience.

Fig 2. Year-wise disposition of fish catches in India in lakh tonnes (Handbook on fisheries statistics, 2023).



The data on the disposition of fish catch in India shows a clear trend toward increasing fresh marketing of fish products over the years. From 2010-11 to 2020-21, fresh marketing volumes have significantly risen, reaching 105.64 lakh tonnes in 2020-21, highlighting growing consumer preference for fresh fish. This trend underscores the importance of improving market access and establishing fair trade practices for fresh fish, as it is the most in-demand form of fish product. Meanwhile, frozen fish sales have grown substantially, especially recently, from 7.33 lakh tonnes in 2010-11 to 18.49 lakh tonnes in 2020-21. This indicates a rising demand for frozen fish, driven by urbanization and the need for convenient, long-lasting options. In contrast, curing has remained relatively low and stable, suggesting it is less popular than fresh and frozen options. These insights reflect India's evolving consumer demand patterns and emphasize the need for fish farmers to access fair and supportive markets that align with these preferences. Improved market access can help farmers capitalize on the demand for fresh and frozen fish, supporting higher incomes and sustainable growth in the fisheries sector.

Current Challenges for Fish Farmers in Accessing Markets

Fish farmers need help accessing domestic and international markets, limiting their growth and profitability. A primary obstacle is limited infrastructure—specifically, inadequate cold storage, transport, and processing facilities—which restricts their ability to maintain product quality and reach broader markets. Poor post-harvest handling and minimal value addition further hinder effective market linkages, making it difficult for small-scale farmers to connect with buyers directly. Many fish farmers rely heavily on intermediaries due to limited market access, which reduces their earnings as middlemen take a share of the profits. This dependence weakens farmers' negotiating power and financial stability. Market volatility is another concern, as fluctuating fish prices impact income stability. Price changes driven by seasonal, demand, and global factors add uncertainty, complicating farmers' efforts to achieve steady earnings.

Moreover, fish farmers often need more awareness of essential market requirements, such as quality standards and certifications for premium markets. This knowledge gap limits their ability to secure higher prices and access better markets. High transaction costs, particularly for those in remote areas, further add to their challenges, alongside economic threats from diseases, rising feed costs, and competition with industrial fisheries. Environmental issues, including climate change and overfishing, further strain small-scale fisheries, while limited access to finance, regulatory pressures, and inadequate training also hamper their growth. These challenges underscore the need for targeted support to improve market access, reduce reliance on intermediaries, and equip fish farmers with the tools to meet quality standards, ensuring fairer trade practices and more stable incomes.

The Importance of Fair Trade in Fisheries

1. **Sustainable Practices:** Fair trade encourages eco-friendly fishing methods that help conserve marine resources for future generations.
2. **Better Economic Conditions for Fishers:** It ensures fishers receive fair wages, improving their financial stability and reducing exploitation.
3. **Labour Rights Protection:** By guaranteeing fair pay, secure working conditions, and social benefits, fair trade upholds workers' rights.
4. **Traceability and Transparency:** It promotes transparency in the supply chain, helping consumers trace seafood to its source and ensuring ethical practices.
5. **Community Empowerment:** Fair trade supports collective decision-making, empowering fishing communities to manage their resources and governance.
6. **Market Access and Demand:** Fair trade opens international markets to small-scale fishers, increasing their income by meeting the growing demand for sustainably sourced products.
7. **Poverty Alleviation:** It helps alleviate poverty in coastal communities by providing stable, fair incomes for fishers and their families.
8. **Environmental and Social Standards:** Fair trade upholds high environmental and social standards, ensuring seafood is harvested responsibly while promoting social justice.

Enhancing Market Access for Fish Farmers

Cooperatives and Collective Bargaining

Cooperatives empower fish farmers to pool resources, share marketing costs, and negotiate better prices. By combining harvests, they attract larger buyers and enhance access to national and international markets. This collective approach ensures financial stability and long-term sustainability for fish farming communities.

Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) Channels

D2C channels allow fish farmers to boost profits by bypassing intermediaries. Through farmers' markets, retail chains, and online platforms, farmers connect directly with consumers, building brand loyalty and maximizing margins. These channels offer access to a wider audience and enable competitive pricing, enhancing profitability.

Digital Marketplaces

Digital platforms transform fish marketing by connecting farmers directly with consumers and wholesalers, reducing reliance on intermediaries. Apps like e-NAM streamline logistics, offer market insights, and expand reach to urban markets. By promoting sustainable practices, farmers attract eco-conscious buyers, ensuring competitive positioning and profitability.

Key Success Factors for Improving Market Access and Fair Trade in Fisheries

Strategic Choice for Market Access

- Conduct thorough market research to identify the most suitable consumer segments for certified fisheries products. Understanding the specific preferences of target consumers will guide decisions on compliance with relevant certification schemes, such as organic or sustainable seafood certifications.
- Strengthen producer organizations (POs) to ensure the long-term sustainability of business models in fisheries. Developing managerial and organizational skills within POs will help manage certification processes, enhance market engagement, and provide sustainable income generation.
- Fish farmers should strive to have ownership of their certification schemes, as it offers greater market diversification and reduces risk. This requires investment in organizational development and improving financial and business management skills within the PO.
- Establish robust quality management systems to obtain and maintain certification. By ensuring the quality of their products, fish farmers can secure higher-value markets and reduce the risks associated with non-compliance.
- Fish farmers must be educated on the certification standards and principles they must comply with. Regular capacity-building activities, including training and workshops, will ensure that they understand these standards and can avoid inefficiencies or non-conformity.
- Participate in local fairs, markets, and contests to better understand consumer preferences and trends. Promoting fish products through these channels helps raise awareness and enhances the farmers' marketing skills, ultimately improving their market positioning.
- Producers should diversify into other markets, such as agro-processing, tourism, or local restaurants. This diversification provides new income opportunities and reduces reliance on single market channels, but requires strong organizational structures and managerial capabilities.

Value Creation for Fish Farmers

1. Sustainable Capacity Building

- ❖ Continuous learning and capacity-building efforts are essential to maintaining learning, and capacity-building efforts, along with terminating partnerships can be leveraged to support training programs to sustain these certifications.

2. Clear Understanding of Value-Adding Attributes

- ❖ Producers must know the unique attributes that add value to their certified fish products. By understanding what differentiates their products (e.g., sustainability,

traceability), fish farmers can better position their goods in the high-value markets, benefiting from premium pricing.

Value Capture Encouragement

1. Capturing Added Value

- ❖ A clear market linkage must be established to ensure fish farmers capture the price premium associated with certification. Prior buyer agreements will provide market security and encourage producers to invest in certification.

2. Cost-Reduction through Group Certification

- ❖ Group certification is an effective strategy for reducing certification costs, especially for small-scale fish farmers. By organizing themselves into groups or cooperatives, farmers can pool their resources, making the certification process more affordable.

3. Understanding Cost-Benefit

- ❖ Fish farmers should clearly understand the costs involved in the certification process. Analyzing the cost-benefit ratio will help them decide whether certification is financially viable and worth the investment in the long term.

Value Network Development for Fair Trade in Fisheries

1. Accessing Market Information

- ❖ Market information systems should be accessible to fish farmers, providing data on consumer preferences, price trends, and certification requirements. This empowers farmers to negotiate better prices and make informed market decisions.

2. Encouraging Participatory Certification Processes

- ❖ Involving producers in the definition of certification procedures improves their confidence, skills, and bargaining power. This participatory approach has been successful in initiatives such as national organic and GI schemes and should be encouraged for fisheries certification.

3. Linking with Strategic Partners

- ❖ Fish farmers should collaborate with socially responsible businesses, such as eco-friendly retailers and wholesalers, to ensure their products are ready for market. A supportive business environment, with clear regulations and contract farming options, is necessary to build trust and confidence among partners.

4. Positive Externalities

- ❖ Certification can bring indirect benefits, such as improving the local economy and community welfare. These positive externalities, including increased local

employment and enhanced community development, should be communicated to consumers and producers to promote fair trade further.

Conclusion

In conclusion, enhancing market access and promoting fair trade are vital for the sustainability of the fisheries sector. Addressing challenges such as poor infrastructure, market volatility, and limited knowledge of certifications can empower fish farmers, improve their financial stability, and support sustainable fishing practices. Strategies like strengthening cooperatives, adopting certification schemes, and leveraging digital platforms will help reduce intermediaries and open new market opportunities. Fairtrade ensures better income, environmental sustainability, and social equity, enabling fish farmers to thrive while fostering responsible consumption. These efforts will secure long-term growth for the industry and benefit fishing communities.

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