

To

Shri Sagar Mehra,
Chief Executive,
Department of Fisheries,
Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying,
Government of India,
Hyderabad, Telangana.

Sub.: S M Sehgal Foundation's Inputs for the Draft National Fisheries Policy 2020

Respected Shri Sagar Mehra,

It gives us immense pleasure to congratulate the Ministry on its recently announced¹ initiative of Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana for boosting fisheries sector in India. It is a progressive policy to bring about a Blue Revolution in the country and support its economic growth trajectory.

In response to the invited comments on the Draft National Fisheries Policy 2020, S M Sehgal Foundation, a registered public charitable trust has the following inputs for your kind consideration:

A. Inland fisheries development in Salinity affected groundwater areas

Salinity affects about 2-lakh sq. km of area in arid and semi-arid aquifers of the country². Management of salinity in the soil through chemical amendments is often costly and requires availability of freshwater that is not readily available in these areas. As a result, farming in salinity-affected areas is difficult and poses a threat to agriculture livelihoods of farmers³.

Inland fisheries in saline water areas offer a lucrative alternative livelihood option for communities and is featured under the brackish water aquaculture component of the draft policy. Long term investments in the fisheries sector can potentially infuse the local economy in saline groundwater areas with the necessary diversification and secure rural livelihoods.

1. There is an urgent need to conduct aquaculture zoning for planned development of these areas along with making provisions for processing and storage units.
2. The identified aquaculture zones should be provided with economic incentives to attract infrastructure investments from private companies.

¹ PIB <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1625535> Accessed on 23.5.2020

² <http://cgwb.gov.in/WQ/GROUND%20WATER%20QUALITY%20SCENARIO%20IN%20INDIA.pdf> Accessed on 22.5.2020

³ Bulletin of the National Institute of Ecology 15: 69-80, 2005 Gupta et al. (Editors): Ecology and Environmental Management: Issues and Research Needs. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285164384_Salinity_Research_in_India_an_overview/link/560a3d7a08ae4d86bb136993/download . Accessed on 22.5.2020

3. The National Fisheries Policy should support incentivizing farmers to take up aquaculture in these areas and involve small farmers, landless and migrant population with an alternate source of income.

B. Promotion of Small Scale Farm ponds

Developing aquaculture in ponds/tanks often requires water to be maintained through constant groundwater pumping and is therefore not suitable in water stressed areas. In order to maximize the benefits for small holder farmers, farm ponds are a convenient alternative. Additionally, they offer nutritional and income security at the household level; and have been shown to result in increased soil moisture and groundwater recharge.

1. Farm ponds through farm bunding and other techniques should be promoted in a large scale across the country because of their multiple benefits.
2. Geo tanks with Biofloc is a promising technology that should be promoted through adequate incentives such as subsidies. They offer a number of advantages over traditional tanks such as being portable and reusable. Low cost nature of this technology makes it suitable for promotion amongst small holder farmers.

C. Rejuvenating of Existing Ponds/Tanks

A nationwide program is recommended to promote rejuvenation of traditional tanks/ponds that are widespread across the country. An estimate shows that 1.5 million hectare of small reservoirs and 1.7 million hectares of medium and large reservoirs are amenable for aquaculture development⁴. This offers an opportunity to set up fish farming in a community model wherein additional features of water and livelihood security are promised.

1. Rural and Urban water bodies are often suited for natural growth of fish and offer income opportunities. However, pollution and low level of oxygen in these water bodies inhibit growth of fishes. These structures should be protected through development of aquaculture with locally suited fish species.
2. Groundwater based fisheries should be discouraged as much as possible with depleting levels of groundwater.

D. Capacity Building at Gram Panchayat (GP) level

1. The GP members representatives should be given technical training to make use of local water bodies for aquaculture promotion. Certain incentive mechanisms such as performance appraisal of Gram Panchayats based on aquaculture promotion could be considered.
2. Aquaculture development should become a mandatory component of Gram Panchayat Development Plans (where applicable) and should form a part of the planning process after due technical considerations.

⁴ Miao W., Silva S.D., Davy B. (eds.) (2010) Inland Fisheries Enhancement and Conservation in Asia. FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand. RAP Publication 2010/22, 189 pp

3. Extension services with respect to aquaculture should be strengthened and awareness programs for schemes on fish cultivation and setting up fish cultivation units should be conducted with the help of civil society members at gram panchayat level.

4. Government program should focus on developing entrepreneurship among the community members with planned expansion in the identified aquaculture zones to include setting up of Small and Medium Scale Industries for value addition.

E. Strengthening Institutional Support for Aquaculture

1. In order to preserve the diverse genepool of local varieties of fishes, and support development of improved varieties, a dedicated institute to preserve genetic resources should be set up on the lines of National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources.

2. There is an urgent need to scale up and upgrade government hatcheries with latest technological advancements that is developed by research institutions.

3. Focus of developing government hatcheries to allow mass production of seeds can help scale up the uptake of aquaculture across the country.

4. In addition, to increase the outreach of seed availability small scale hatcheries and fish cultivation should be promoted in both fresh and saline water areas, such as Biofloc fish farm cultivation.

5. Brood stock in the nurseries feeding the supply of seeds should be mixed often to avoid inbreeding.

S M Sehgal Foundation has been working with the rural communities at the grassroots for more than two decades on issues around food security, water security and social justice. Our recommendations are a sounding board of the rural populations and their experiential insights generated from engaging in context specific livelihood options.

It is our sincere hope that the inputs above would be considered for inclusion in the draft National Policy Fisheries Policy 2020 that is a praiseworthy initiative towards consolidating policy efforts in developing fisheries sector in India.

Yours Sincerely,

S M Sehgal Foundation

About Us

S M Sehgal Foundation (Sehgal Foundation) is a public, charitable trust registered in India since 1999. Our mission is to strengthen community-led development initiatives to achieve positive social, economic, and environmental change across rural India. We envision every person across rural India empowered to lead a more secure, prosperous, and dignified life. For more information visit: <https://www.smsfoundation.org/>