PRELIMINARY STUDY ON ACUTE IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC TO SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES IN THAILAND

Training Department
Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center

Mr. Isara Chanrachkij
Mr. Jeerasak Larnmeen
Ms. Jariya Sornkliang
Mr. Nakaret Yasook
Ms. Penchan Laongmanee
Ms. Thanyalak Sausi
Ms. Rattana Tiaye
Mr. Santhipong Putsa
The study aims to answer the following questions asked by the FAO to SEAFDEC

- What is the current status of the country in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What are the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to the small-scale fishing communities on the following aspects?
  1. Fishing activities
  2. Trade
  3. Processing
  4. Consumption
  5. Gender
  6. Assistance
  7. Fishery resources
Materials and Method

- **Where:** Nine (9) Provinces of Thailand (see map)
- **When:** April – May 2020
- **How:** Rural Rapid Appraisal (structured interviews by telecommunication)
- **Who:** Small-scale fishers (n=12), Fisheries officer (n=1)
Timeline of COVID-19 Outbreak in Thailand

12 January
The first Chinese tourist from Wuhan China

31 January
The first case of Thai person

6 and 9 March
Contact tracing of super spreaders

2 April
Prohibited entering Thailand
3 April
Nationwide curfew
4 April
Lockdown country

23 March
Contact tracing from Hotspot area
24 March
Announcement state of Emergency
26 March
Enforcement state of Emergency

28 April
Agriculturist Assistance Project

Source: https://www.bangkokbiznews.com/news/detail/875664
Question 1
Fishing activities

Are fishers allowed to go fishing?

- **LOCKDOWN HAD NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**
  - Small-scale fishers can travel from their homes to fishing ports
  - Some areas need permission document issued by the leader of community or village
  - Granting permission is not complicated because they are local fishers

- **INSUFFICIENT MANPOWER** (In border province)
  
  Boarding passes could not be reissued to foreign workers to return to Thailand to work in commercial fishing vessels
Are markets open and accessible? How are the logistics and transportation of products carried out?

**Seafood Supply Chain**
- Middlemen could not deliver the products to the markets due to travel restrictions during the lockdown in district, provincial, and national levels.
- Some middlemen discontinued seafood trade activities, thus, some fishers stopped fishing activities.
- Reduced trade volume due to limited operation period of wholesale markets.

**Online Trade**
- Younger members of the fishing families adapted to online trading to sell their fresh and processed products.

**Small-Scale Cold Chain**
- Fresh seafood preferred by customers could not be delivered outside the provincial area because of the difficulty to maintain the quality of frozen products.

**Supply and Demand**
- Local markets, wholesale fish markets, middlemen, and tourism are significant to the trade of marine products.
**Question 3**

**Processing**

Is there enough supply of fish? Are processing facilities open and accessible?

---

**SEAFOOD SUPPLY**

- Fishers preferred to trade fresh fish at local markets. But if the price was low, fishers would process the fish as an alternative.

---

**FISH PROCESSING** *(Raw materials for processing)*

- There was a shortage of raw materials because middlemen could not deliver products to the market, thus, they discontinued seafood trade activities. Some fishers stopped fishing due to lack of capital.
- But fishers who catch, market, and process the fish by themselves did not have any problem.

---

**E-COMMERCE**

- Facilitated by the younger members of the family.
- There is a need to improve the quality of processed products.
- Consumers prefer to know the origin of the products, therefore, the traceability system for small-scale fisheries products should be improved.
Is there an increase or decrease in the demand of fish?

- **DEMAND HAS DECREASED**
  - Restrictions in local markets made it difficult for consumers to access fish and fishery products
  - Behavior change of the consumers as they preferred foods that can be stored for a long time and easily cooked (e.g., chicken, pork, eggs, etc.)
  - Closure of the tourism industry and its chains (e.g. hotels, restaurants, etc.)
  - Trash fish for aquaculture also decreased because of reduced demand of aquaculture fish products (e.g. seabass) from tourism industry and its chains

- **DEMAND COULD BE INCREASED**
  - E-commerce could possibly enhance the access and demand of fish and fishery products
  - Online trade could introduce new processed products, but there were limitations on delivery services
The major roles of women are fish processing and fish trade. During the pandemic, women became jobless and lost their income because of lack of raw materials for processing.

Online trade, which is facilitated by the younger family members, has become the significant adaptation of the family business to cope with the pandemic.

Each family member has specific roles and responsibilities. During the pandemic, relationship among family members has become more intact and resulted in higher income than before the pandemic.
Was there any assistance provided for the fish farmers and small-scale fishers?

- Food and daily subsistence goods were provided by the local government.
- Government provided the support of THB 5,000/month (USD 167 USD/month) to registered fish farmers and small-scale fishers in the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives under Fisheries Act 2015. The fund was released through the Agriculturist Assistance Project approved by the Cabinet in 28 April 2020.
What are the impacts to the fishery resources based on fishers’ perspective?

Fishers have varying opinions on the trend of fishery resources if the recovery from the pandemic would take long time.

FISHERY RESOURCES WOULD BECOME POORER because fishing pressure would become higher. Jobless people return to their hometowns and engage in fishing.

FISHERY RESOURCES COULD RECOVER due to the decrease in fishing efforts. Some commercial fishing boats cannot operate because of lack of workers, while some small-scale fishing activities have stopped because of lack of market and capital.

HABITATS COULD RECOVER because of the closure of the tourism industry. There are no more human activities that would disturb the marine environment.
Role of SEAFDEC

STRENGTHEN AND ENHANCE THE WELL-BEING OF SMALL-SCALE FISHERS

- **CONDUCT** R & D appropriate for small-scale fisheries
  - Fish handling techniques to improve the quality of catch
  - Cold chain management

- **PROMOTE** the appropriate technology to reduce manpower in fishing operations
  - Improve the skill of fishers to operate modern deck machinery onboard fishing vessels

- **PROMOTE** the collection of data and development of database on small-scale fisheries to support fisheries management
Mr. Niwat Thanyachart (Chantaburi Province)  
Mr. Nimitr Panchasutra (Petchaburi Province)  
Ms. Kanyapatchara Raksa (Ranong Province)  
Mr. Sommart Madsawang (Phang Nga Province)  
Mr. Sunthorn Torthip (Phuket Province)  
Mr. Kormeed To-kanee (Krabi Province)  
Anonymous fishery officer (Ms.) from Rayong  

Mr. Sarawut Kaokom (Trat Province)  
Mr. Visutara Boonnak (Chumporn Province)  
Mr. Somchai To-mard (Phang Nga Province)  
Mr. Phuavadon Sinsa (Phang Nga Province)  
Mr. Sompong Sittisak (Phuket Province)  
Anonymous fisher (Ms.) form Bangkok

Mr. Omar Riego Penarubia: Officer of the Products, Trade and Marketing Branch (FIAM) Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and Resources Division, Fisheries and Aquaculture Department (Food and Agriculture Organization: FAO) *

Mr. Suchart Sangchan: Head of Andaman Sea Fisheries Research and Development Center (Phuket)

Ms. Malinee Smithrithee: Secretary General and Chief of Training Department of Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center