

MARINE FISHERY GOVERNANCE AND THE BLUE ECONOMY IN INDIA: A POLICY ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL FISHERIES POLICY 2020

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Indian fisheries are found to be woven around the mythology, culture, and social fabric in a specific and diversified area of geographies, with the great Himalayas being in the north to the Oceans in the peninsular half of the country. This paper examines the legal aspect of NFP 2020 and how it can revolutionise the marine fishery resource management practices in India. A human legal governance system based upon communities and ecosystems as well as intergenerational justice assists in establishing how the policy is a fundamental tool of environmental and social-ecological sustainability. The paper illustrates how legal systems should change the structuring of the system in response to the changing sustainable development issues in the marine environment.

Introduction

The Indian Ocean is the cradle of life, where individuals earn their livelihood, and the economic avenue is unrestricted, yet growing environmental crisis is shrinking marine eco-system, as the traditional coastal homes fight to survive. Overfishing, plastic pollution and climate change are rapidly reducing ocean sustainability. In such a scenario, The National Fisheries Policy 2020 (NFP 2020) emerged as a vital instrument for sustainable and equitable marine resource management and supports India's vision of sustainable blue economy that balances ecological protection with economic growth.

Legal Context and Policy background

The fisheries sector in India operates under multiple legislative frameworks including Indian Fisheries Act, 1897 and followed by the Marine Fishing Regulation Acts

(MFRAs) of coastal states, and now NFP 2020. The entire legal framework functions to support sustainable development and control fishing actions and boost economic performance. The National Fisheries Policy 2020 emphasizes precautionary and eco-system-based management, recognise the finite nature of marine resources¹.

Blue Economy and Sustainable Fisheries

The Blue Economy promotes sustainable ocean based economic growth, better livelihoods, job creation, and the well-being of marine ecosystems. It heavily depends on the sustainability of fisheries, as this has guaranteed the sustainability of marine biodiversity in the long run. The World Bank defines Blue Economy as the use of ocean resources in a sustainable way to develop economically and provide jobs to people and maintain the health of the marine ecosystems². By the year 2030, the OECD estimates that the ocean-based economies such as marine energy and shipping will create an accelerated growth in the world economy compared to the conventional sectors³. NFP 2020 in India corresponds to the major international principles,

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such as FAO Code of Conduct Responsible Fisheries, UNCLOS, and SDG 14: Life Below Water commitments⁴.

Analysis of National Fisheries Policy (NFP) 2020

The National Fisheries Policy (NFP) 2020 is anchored on the keys of sustainability, equity, technological development, and good governance. It facilitates the use of science to manage fisheries and enhances legal institutions to conserve. Key provisions include:

- i. Zonation of the fishing areas for orderly and sustainable resource use⁵.
- ii. Compulsory Catch Reporting and Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) to improve monitoring, transparency and accountability in the fishing activities.
- iii. Promotion of Low-Impact Fishing Technologies⁶.
- iv. Climate Resilience to Fishery Management Plans to address impacts of climate⁷.

Impact on Marine Resource Management:

The National Fisheries Policy (NFP) 2020 is a progressive and policy, yet heavily dependent on effective implementation since the issues of overfishing, pollution, lack of coordination among the states, and data collection are still challenging. The policy focuses on stakeholder involvement, gender balance and economic empowerment of fishers and fish farmers^{8,9}.

Human Legal Approach and Socio-Economic Dimensions

Nation Fisheries Policy, 2020 (NFP) promotes community involvement by assisting communities and other individual entities to form partnerships and contributes to Fisheries and Fish Farmers Producer Organisations (FFPOs). Gender equality is recognised but, but expansion of mariculture and deep-sea fishing may restrict access for traditional small-scale fishers, raising concerns about livelihood security. Environmental justice is also integrated through climate adaptation and disaster management strategies.

Achieving Sustainable Development Goals: A Legal and Policy Analysis:

The National Fisheries Policy (NFP) 2020 is the most important legal and policy document in India that will be used to align the fisheries sector with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It helps in SDG 1

(No Poverty) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) by ensuring sustainable fish production to increase food security and decrease poverty through sound business conduct¹⁰. It also promotes SDG 5 (Gender Equality) since it acknowledges the essential contribution of women in fisheries and gender equity as a priority in aquaculture and fishery value chains. Within the policy under SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), the policy aims at modernizing fisheries, building value chains, attracting privates, and extending the levels of community-level participation to create decent jobs¹¹. In response to SDG 13 (Climate Action), it incorporates the adaptive response and local disaster response systems to resilient livelihood in the face of climate risks¹². Based on SDG 14 (Life Below Water), the policy embraces Fisheries Ecosystem Approach (EAF) in conserving the ecological integrity and safeguarding aquatic ecosystems¹³. Moreover, it promotes SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through enhancing the cooperation between governmental agencies, fishers, and aqua farmers. However, achieving these goals requires addressing issues of inclusivity and equitable resource distribution.

Challenges in NFP 2020:

The NFP 2020 encounters several structural and operational challenges. Its emphasis on the technologically intensive mariculture and deep-sea fishing risks excluding small scale fisheries, while aquaculture expansion rises ecological concern. Persistent infrastructure deficits further weaken value chain efficiency. The policies limited stakeholder engagement and absence of clearly articulated Climate resilience strategies dilute its inclusivity. Moreover, the attempt to subsume diverse fisheries under a unified framework may overlook sector specific regulatory complexities.

Conclusion

NFP 2020 is a major step toward sustainable and inclusive fisheries development in India, aligned with SDGs and the Blue Economy. However, addressing implementation gaps, community participation, equity issues and environmental concerns is essential for realizing its full potential. □

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