



POLICY BRIEF 2

STANDARD OF LIVING IN SMALL-SCALE ARTISANAL FISHING COMMUNITIES OF BANGLADESH



BACKGROUND

Bangladesh has achieved self-sufficiency in fish production, and while a large part of the production comes from fresh-water inland capture fisheries and aquaculture, marine capture fisheries account for more than half of the production. And within the marine fisheries sector, artisanal small-scale capture fisheries still account by far for the biggest share of the production, even though the marine industrial fisheries sub sector has also been growing steadily.

A sector-wide human rights impact assessment (SWIA) was carried out in small-scale artisanal fishing communities in Barguna and Cox's Bazar Districts in Bangladesh during 2019-2020. With the support of DIHR, the SWIA examined the living- and working conditions of poor small-scale fishers and their families through a human rights lens. The report contains findings on the labor conditions, the standard of living, the situation of women – and the environmental and climate change-related human rights issues at stake in the fishing communities. This Policy Brief presents the SWIA's findings on the standard of living in the small-scale artisanal fishing communities, emanating from its human rights-based analysis of their socio-economic situation. The Policy Brief concludes with a series of recommendations to improve the situation.



THE SCENARIO

The human rights system as well as the current development paradigm addresses poverty and poor enjoyment of human rights as entwined and mutually reinforcing issue concern. While poverty can cause a poor and inadequate standard of living with e.g.



poor housing,



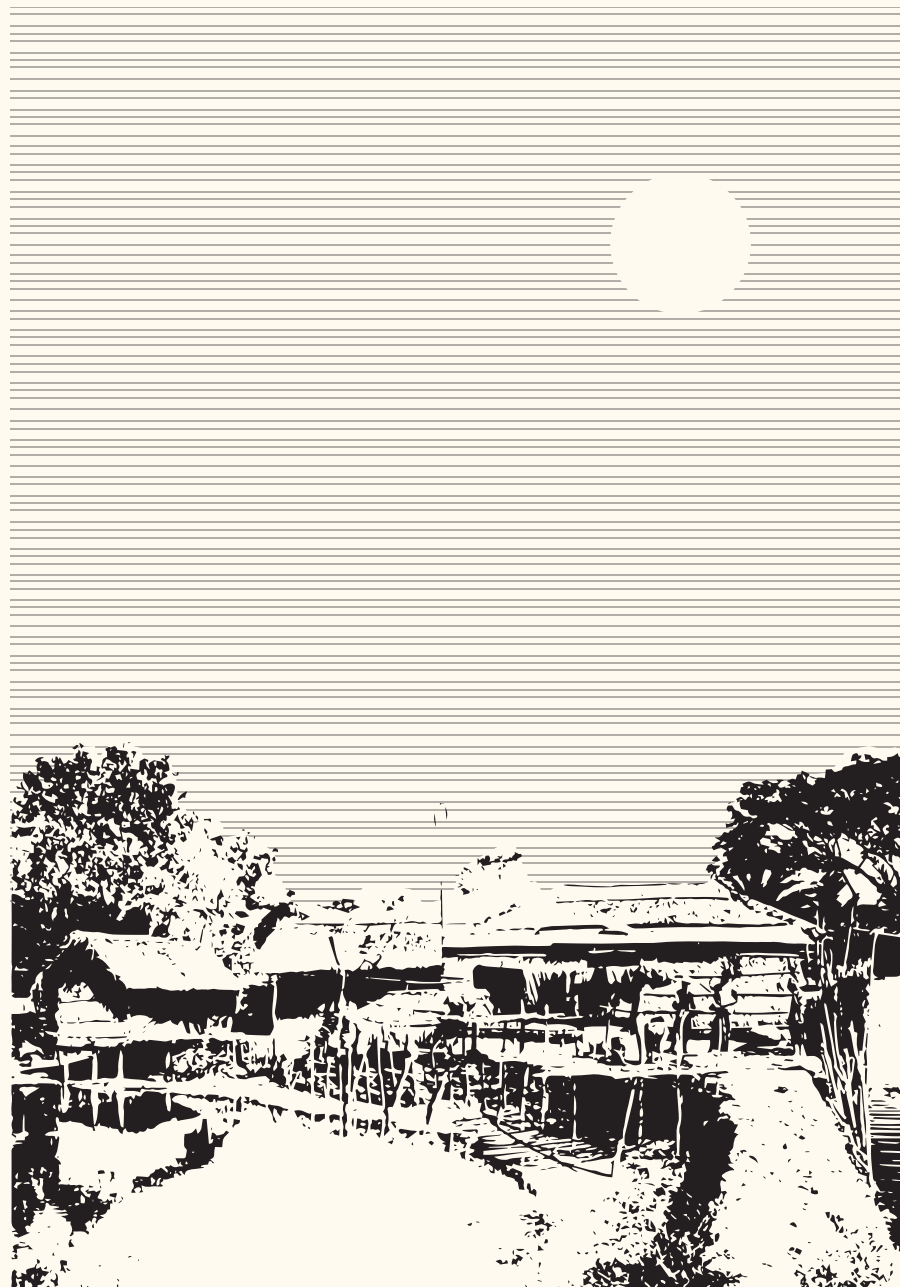
un-healthy water
and poor nutrition,



and thus undermine
the enjoyment of
human rights,

the opposite dynamic is also at play:

Inadequate fulfilment of human rights causes or exacerbates human rights violations where for example youth with poor access to schooling or vocational training opportunities end up working under hazardous and unjust conditions



MAJOR FINDINGS FROM THE SWIA



Almost all the fishermen reported fishing as their main source of income which does not generate enough money to cover their families' basic expenses



The average income of fishermen is BDT 93,000 while the average expenditure is BDT 120,000 per year



One third of the respondents have a yearly income of less than 75,000 BDT



One fourth of the respondents have access to social security allowances



Many take loans from banks, NGOs and from money lenders



38% respondents reported that water sources are not accessible for all



30% reported that water is not clear, and half of the respondents reported that drinking water tastes of salt



56% of the respondents reported that their families suffer from water-borne diseases



89% said primary health care facilities are available within a reasonable distance from communities



80% respondents say that they have to pay for medical services



During 2019, the 65 Days Ban on fishing that started in late May left the fisheries-dependent coastal communities without any means of livelihood during a time of year that would normally be considered high season for fishing



Some compensation was offered in the form of rations of rice, but these were insufficient to cover the losses



In 2020, the combined effects of the 65 Day Ban and the Covid-19 restrictions were devastating in the coastal artisanal fishing communities



70% reported having lost half of their income or more due to Covid-19 restrictions, while 74% did not receive any social security allowances



33% respondents reported having no income at all during the 65 Day Ban in 2020, and 90% reported having taken loans during the Ban



Fishers are not, in general, opposed to the bans – but they request support for sustaining their families without increasing their debt during the bans

RECOMMENDATIONS

The SWIA data reveals a high level of poverty, both in monetary terms, and manifested in the poor quality of housing and water available to the fishers and families interviewed. The income is far below the national average, and not sufficient to cover the needs of ordinary household expenditures. Needless to say, this is linked to the poor payment fishers receive for their work, and the cycles of debt and bonded labour conditions under which many work. At the same time, insufficient access to social security, and a lack of alternative livelihood options, which again is linked to the poor access to vocational training or publicly funded employment schemes, exacerbate the poor standard of living. Major specific recommendations are:



Provide social safety net allowances to fishers during ban periods and make sure that allowances reach those in need



Formalize the issuing of fisher ID cards by setting clear criteria for obtaining the Card



Reduce the complexity in distribution of the different types of social security allowances



Consider the adequacy of food ration support as compared to direct cash transfers to recipients' bank accounts



Complement social security allowances in cash or kind with government-supported income-generation schemes



Develop an enabling environment for productive employment opportunities through relevant education and vocational training



Secure small-scale fishers' access to credit schemes and free them from the poverty trap of indebtedness to local money-lenders

