

FISHER LIVELIHOODS IN THE AYEYARWADY RIVER DELTA - FINDINGS REPORT -

Small-scale inland fishing in the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) River Delta is an important livelihood activity for many rural households, and also contributes significantly to the wider economy and the nutritional requirements of the population. However, recent development in the Delta has placed additional demands on the ecosystem services that fishers rely on. Through semi-structured interviews, this study found out about the concerns and challenges faced by fishers in five fishing villages close to the Delta region's capital city of Patheingyi. A summary of the findings is listed below.

- Of the 23 fishers interviewed, every person reported a decline in fish catch over at least the past five years. The average decline over five years was 76 per cent (See Table 1: Reported Fish Catch Decline)
- Fishing most often occurs as one activity within a more diverse livelihood strategy. Riverbank gardening, keeping livestock and making clothes were other common activities included in a household's livelihood strategy (See Figure 1: Livelihoods Calendar). The entire household may work together, and sometimes also with other local households, to catch and sell fish.
- Sustaining a fishing livelihood is becoming harder because fish catch is decreasing.
- Fishers adjust their fishing practices according to the time of year and the height of the tide.
- The interviewed fishers provided five main explanations for the decline in fish catch. In order of most frequently mentioned, these were; illegal fishing, sand mining, the increase in small-scale fishers, pollution from nearby factories, and increases in commercial fishing.
- Communication about these ideas occurred minimally between fishers of different villages, and also occurred less often between older as opposed to younger fishers.
- Many villagers who were previously fishers have transferred to other livelihoods, such as working for a wage at one of the garment factories, or constructing houses in their village.
- On stretches of the Patheingyi River where fishers live and where sand mining had been occurring, fishers were noticing extreme rates of riverbank erosion. Each of these fishers attributed the riverbank erosion to sand mining activity.
- Overall, fishers generally expressed feeling powerless in improving their working environment. Many fishers linked this to the minimal support and protections provided by the Department of Fisheries (to whom they pay an annual license fee) and the General Administration Department.

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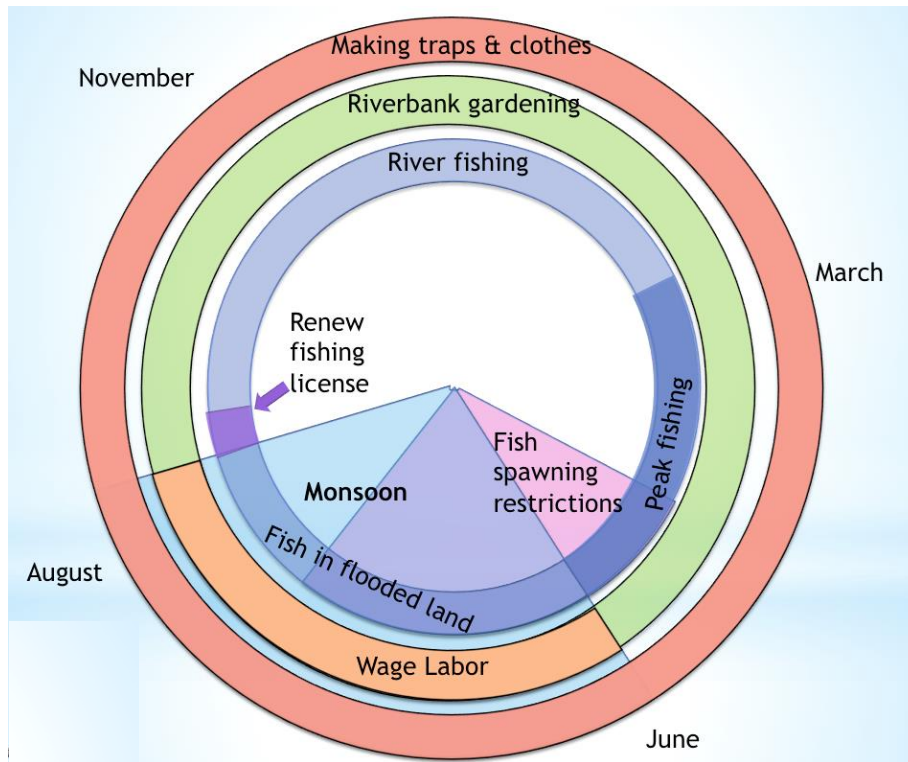


Figure 1. Livelihoods Calendar. This cyclic calendar is a simplification of fisher livelihoods in river villages surrounding Pathein. It demonstrates how the livelihood strategies of fishers change through the year and how they are highly influenced by the monsoon. During the monsoon (June to August), wage labor replaces growing vegetables, and while fishing may continue, it is generally less productive than other times of the year.

Village (number of fishers)	Average Reported % of fish catch compared to 5y ago
Kwin Pauk (4)	20.75
Cani (4)	50
Thaephyu (6)	22.8
Shan (5)	15
Dukawa (2)	30

Table 1: Reported Fish Catch Decline. The left column shows how many fishers in the village provided an estimate to the change in their daily catch of fish compared to five years ago and the right column shows this as an average for the village.