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Fish diversity and fisheries management status of Gondia district, Maharashtra, India

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Abstract

The Gondia district in eastern Maharashtra, India, features extensive aquatic ecosystems, including reservoirs (e.g., Navegaon Bandh and Itiadh), seasonal water bodies, and wetlands, supporting a vital inland capture fishery. This study investigated ichthyofaunal diversity, current fisheries management practices, and the socio-economic profiles of fishermen cooperative societies. Through catch sampling, market surveys, and taxonomic identification, 61 fish species belonging to 19 families were documented. Cyprinidae was the most dominant family with 27 species, followed by Bagridae (Six species); Ambassidae, Channidae, Mastacembelidae, and Siluridae, each with three species; Clariidae, Cichlidae, and Cobitidae, each with two species. Commercial catches were dominated by Indian Major Carps (IMCs: *Labeo Catla*, *Labeo rohita*, *Cirrhinus mrigala*) and exotic carps (*Cyprinus carpio*, *Hypophthalmichthys molitrix*, *Ctenopharyngodon idella*), with secondary contributions from catfishes, murrels (*Channa* spp.), tilapias (*Oreochromis* spp.), and spiny eels (*Mastacembelus* spp.). Gill nets and drag nets are the predominant fishing gear. Data from 45 active cooperative societies (Total membership = 2, 116) showed low female participation (11.7%), widespread low literacy, inconsistent adherence to seasonal fishing bans, and reliance on annual stocking of IMCs and exotic carps sourced from local (Ambhora, Itiadh) and external hatcheries. District fish production increased steadily from 4, 733 tonnes in 2017-18 to 8, 033 tonnes in 2021-22. Off-season livelihoods (4-6 months) primarily involve agriculture (42%), wage labor (48%), and residual capture fisheries (10%). The findings reveal strong fisheries potential alongside critical socio-economic and management challenges, including gender disparity, educational gaps and regulatory non-compliance. Recommendations include enhanced cooperative governance, targeted extension programs, scientific stocking protocols, and livelihood diversification to ensure sustainable fisheries and improved socio-economic security for fisher communities in the Gondia district.

Keywords: Ichthyofaunal diversity, Gondia district, fishermen cooperatives, socio-economic status, Indian major carps

1. Introduction

Inland fisheries are a foundation of India's food security, nutritional security, and rural economy, contributing substantially to national fish production amid rapid sectoral expansion in recent decades (FAO, 2022; Department of Fisheries, 2025-26) ^[6, 5]. Freshwater fish diversity in India is exceptionally high, with approximately 930 species recorded from inland habitats out of a total of ~2, 500 fish species (Jayaram, 2010) ^[8]. The northeastern region and Western Ghats constitute global biodiversity hotspots, supporting a disproportionate share of ichthyofaunal richness (NBFGFR, 2010) ^[9]. The Gondia district, situated in eastern Maharashtra (geographical area 5, 641 km²), is popularly known as the "city of lakes" owing to its extensive water resources spanning 25, 501 ha, including reservoirs, tanks, seasonal ponds, and wetlands (Brief Industrial Profile of Gondia District, 2012-13; CGWB, 2022) ^[2, 3]. The district lies within the Wainganga River Basin and features dense tropical dry deciduous forests covering 51.2% of its area, along with protected landscapes such as the Nagzira Wildlife Sanctuary and Navegaon National Park (Working Plan for Gondia Forest Division, 2023-33) ^[16]. Major reservoirs include Navegaon Bandh (also known as the Navegaon National Park reservoir), with a catchment area of 10, 344 km² and a storage capacity of approximately 29, 590 million

cubic meters (Paliwal and Bhandarkar, 2013) ^[10], Itiadh, and others. These lentic systems primarily serve irrigation and capture fisheries, supporting the livelihoods of local communities, particularly through fishermen cooperative societies (Velankar, 2011; Raut *et al.*, 2021) ^[15, 13].

The aquatic ecosystems of Gondia harbour rich fish diversity, with studies documenting 55-62 species at key sites such as Navegaon Bandh and the Nagzira-Navegaon corridor (Ghatge *et al.*, 2017; Raut *et al.*, 2021; Pusala *et al.*, 2025) ^[7, 13, 12]. Indian Major Carps (IMCs) and exotic carps often dominate commercial catches, reflecting both natural assemblages and stocking interventions (Paliwal and Bhandarkar, 2013) ^[10]. However, anthropogenic pressures, including tourism-induced pollution, waste disposal, agricultural runoff introducing phosphates and sulfates, overexploitation, and habitat degradation, pose significant threats to ecosystem integrity and fishery sustainability (Paliwal and Bhandarkar, 2013; Badole *et al.*, 2021) ^[10, 1]. Fishermen's cooperative societies form the backbone of fisheries management in Gondia, facilitating resource access, marketing, and collective decision-making. However, socio-economic challenges persist, including low female participation, limited literacy, seasonal livelihood vulnerabilities, and variable compliance with regulatory measures (Velankar, 2011) ^[15]. Fish production in the district has shown progressive growth, aligning with broader inland fisheries trends in Maharashtra, although district-specific data indicate steady increases in recent years. This study assessed the fish diversity, fisheries management practices, and socio-economic status of cooperative societies in Gondia district, with special emphasis on Navegaon Bandh reservoir. Using field observations, market surveys, fish identification, and questionnaire-based data, the study identified key opportunities and constraints for sustainable fishery development in the district.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Study area

This study was conducted in the Gondia district of Maharashtra, located in central India. The district has abundant inland water resources, including lakes, tanks, and reservoirs, and is recognized for its fishery potential. Navegaon Bandh reservoir, one of the important water bodies of the district, formed a key reference site for understanding the regional fisheries situation.

2.2 Collection of fish diversity data

Fish diversity data were collected from reservoir sites, fish landing centers, and local fish markets in the Gondia district. The abundance and frequency of fish species were assessed based on the occurrence of particular species in fishermen's catches and market observations. Collected fish specimens were examined for morphological characteristics and identified using standard taxonomic keys and literature (Talwar and Jhingran, 1991; Jayaram, 2010) ^[14, 8].

2.3 Survey of fishermen cooperative societies

For the socioeconomic and management assessment, information was collected from 45 fishermen cooperative societies in Gondia district through structured questionnaires and discussions with members of management boards. Data were collected on the gender composition of membership, literacy status, fishing gears used, observance of fishing bans, fish species stocked, loan utilization, and off-season livelihood activities.

2.4 Fish production data

Year-wise fish production data for Gondia district from 2017-18 to 2021-22 were compiled from district-level fisheries records available during the study period. These data were used to evaluate production trends.

2.5 Data analysis

The collected data were compiled and summarised using simple descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and tabular presentation, which were calculated using MS Excel 2021. Fish diversity was interpreted in terms of family-wise representation and composition of commercially important species. Socioeconomic and fisheries management information from cooperative societies was analyzed to assess the present management status of fisheries in the district.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Fish production trend in Gondia District

The fish production of Gondia District showed a steady increasing trend during the study period. Total fish production increased from 4, 733 tonnes in 2017-18 to 8, 033 tonnes in 2021-22, indicating growing utilization of inland fisheries resources in the district (Table 1).

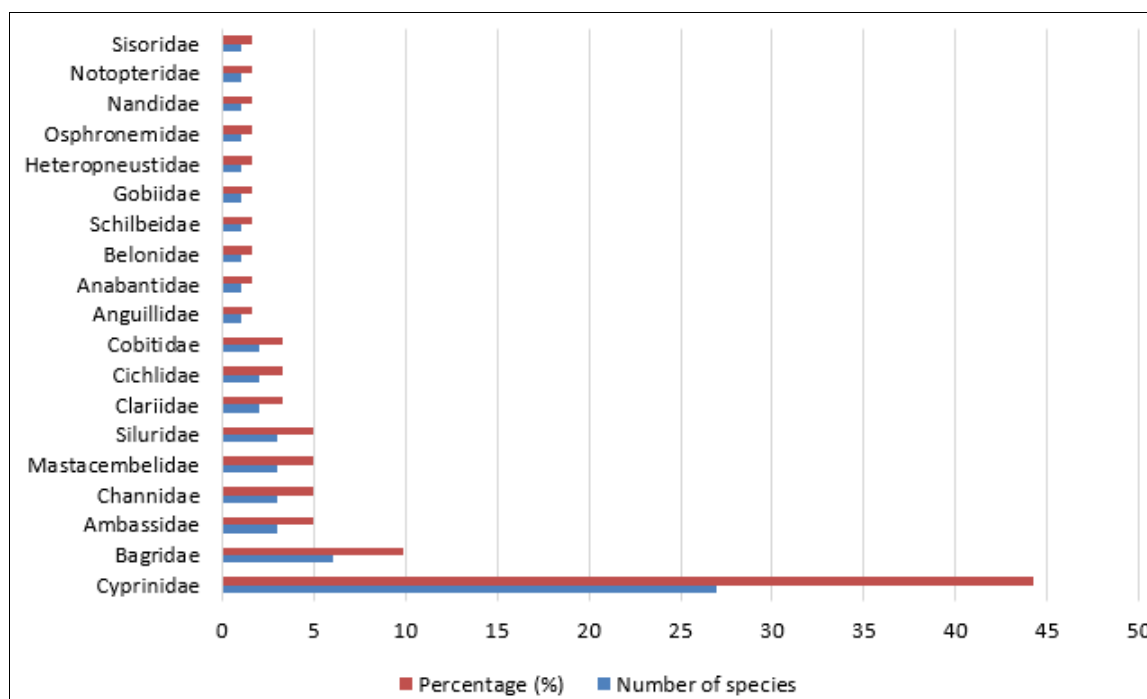
Table 1: Total fish production in Gondia District (tonnes)

Year	Fish production (tonnes)
2017-18	4, 733
2018-19	5, 511
2019-20	6, 419
2020-21	7, 009
2021-22	8, 033

The increase in fish production may be attributed to improved stocking, wider participation of fishermen cooperative societies, and increasing dependence on inland fisheries as a livelihood source. However, augmented production alone should not be interpreted as a sign of ecological sustainability, as long-term management also depends on biodiversity conservation, regulated harvest, and appropriate stocking practices.

3.2 Fish diversity of Gondia district

The fish catch composition of Gondia District revealed the occurrence of 61 fish species belonging to 19 families. Among these, Cyprinidae was the most dominant family with 27 species, followed by Bagridae with 6 species. The families Ambassidae, Channidae, Mastacembelidae, and Siluridae were represented by 3 species each, while Clariidae, Cichlidae, and Cobitidae contributed 2 species each (Fig. 1). The remaining families were represented by a single species. The results indicate that carps dominated the fish catch composition, followed by catfishes, murels, tilapia, and spiny eels. The dominance of Cyprinidae is consistent with the pattern observed in many Indian freshwater ecosystems, where cyprinids constitute the major component of fish diversity and inland fisheries. The occurrence of Indian major carps such as *L. Catla*, *L. rohita*, and *C. mrigala*, along with exotic carps such as *Cyprinus carpio*, *H. molitrix*, and *C. idella*, indicates the mixed character of capture and enhancement fisheries in the district. Documentation of freshwater fish diversity is particularly important in ecologically significant landscapes such as Gondia and Navegaon, where biodiversity and fishery use coexist. Fish catch composition in Gondia district is presented in Table 2.

**Fig 1:** Family-wise summary of fish species**Table 2:** Fish catch composition in Gondia district

Sr. No	Scientific name	Common/local name	Family
1.	<i>Parambassis ranga</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Chandni	Ambassidae
2.	<i>Chanda nama</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Lambizamdi	Ambassidae
3.	<i>Parambassis lala</i> (Bleeker, 1874)	Zambi	Ambassidae
4.	<i>Anguilla bengalensis</i> (Gray, 1831)	Tambu	Anguillidae
5.	<i>Anabas testudineus</i> (Bloch, 1792)	Koi	Anabantidae
6.	<i>Mystus bleekeri</i> (Volz, 1904)	Rengdyakatwa	Bagridae
7.	<i>Mystus cavasius</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Jalya katwa	Bagridae
8.	<i>Mystus vittatus</i> (Scopoli, 1777)	Rengdyakatwa	Bagridae
9.	<i>Sperata seenghala</i> (Sykes, 1839)	Shingta	Bagridae
10.	<i>Rita gogra</i> (Sykes, 1839)	Gagar	Bagridae
11.	<i>Badis badis</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Telgi	Bagridae
12.	<i>Xenentodon cancila</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Chachya	Belonidae
13.	<i>Channa marulius</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Murrel	Channidae
14.	<i>Channa gachua</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Bilona	Channidae
15.	<i>Channa striata</i> (Bloch, 1793)	Dadak	Channidae
16.	<i>Clupisoma taakree</i> (Swainson, 1838)	Warlya	Schilbeidae
17.	<i>Clarias magur</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wagur	Clariidae
18.	<i>Clarius gariepinus</i> (Burchell, 1822)	Sarkari Wagur	Clariidae
19.	<i>Oreochromis niloticus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Laltilapia	Chichlidae
20.	<i>Oreochromis mossambicus</i> (Peters, 1852)	Kaltilapia	Chichlidae
21.	<i>Lepidocephalichthys guntea</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Gahandi	Cobitidae
22.	<i>Lepidocephalichthys thermalis</i> (Valenciennes, 1846)	Lahangahandi	Cobitidae
23.	<i>Labeo Catla</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Catla	Cyprinidae
24.	<i>Cirrhinus mrigala</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Mrugal	Cyprinidae
25.	<i>Ctenopharyngodon Idella</i> (Valenciennes, 1844)	Grass carp	Cyprinidae
26.	<i>Cyprinus carpio</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Cypnus	Cyprinidae
27.	<i>Hypophthalmichthys molitrix</i> (Valenciennes, 1844)	Silver carp	Cyprinidae
28.	<i>Hypophthalmichthys nobilis</i> (J. Richardson, 1845)	Big head	Cyprinidae
29.	<i>Labeo rohu</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Rohu	Cyprinidae
30.	<i>Labeo calbasu</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Mulki rohu	Cyprinidae
31.	<i>Labeo gonis</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Khunus	Cyprinidae
32.	<i>Osteobrama cotio</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Piparpan	Cyprinidae
33.	<i>Oreichthys szcosuatis</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Khavlitepr	Cyprinidae
34.	<i>Pethia conchoni</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Gadad	Cyprinidae
35.	<i>Puntius chola</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Karvali	Cyprinidae
36.	<i>Puntius sarana</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Poshti	Cyprinidae
37.	<i>Puntius sophore</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Karwalitepari	Cyprinidae
38.	<i>Puntius ticto</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Tepari	Cyprinidae
39.	<i>Puntius gelius</i> (Bleeker, 1849)	Karkhandi	Cyprinidae
40.	<i>Salmophasia bacaila</i> (Van Hasselt, 1832)	Persi	Cyprinidae

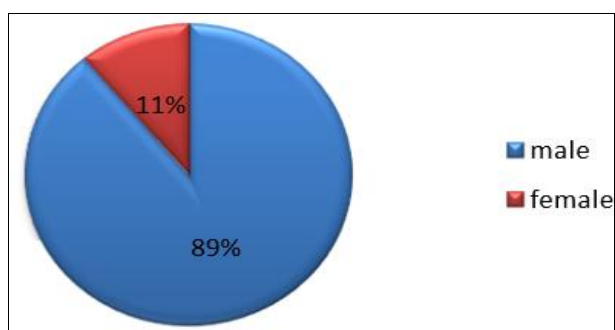
41.	<i>Amblypharyngodon mola</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Molwar	Cyprinidae
42.	<i>Brachydanio rerio</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Ichgani	Cyprinidae
43.	<i>Devario aequipinnatus</i> (McClelland, 1839)	Palvi	Cyprinidae
44.	<i>Rasbora daniconius</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Gani	Cyprinidae
45.	<i>Garra mulya</i> (Sykes, 1839)	Gotechati	Cyprinidae
46.	<i>Tor khudree</i> (Sykes, 1839)	Wadis	Cyprinidae
47.	<i>Hypselobarbus curmuca</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Tembrush	Cyprinidae
48.	<i>Labeo boggut</i> (Sykes, 1839)	Nevara	Cyprinidae
49.	<i>Labeo fimbritus</i> (Bloch, 1795)	Kanas	Cyprinidae
50.	<i>Glossogobius giuris</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Rengsa	Gobiidae
51.	<i>Heteropneustes fossilis</i> (Bloch, 1794)	Singur	Heteropneustidae
52.	<i>Trichogaster fasciata</i> (Bloch and J.G. Schneider, 1801)	Chakmaki	Osphronemidae
53.	<i>Macrognathus aral</i> (Bloch and J.G. Schneider, 1801)	Bam	Mastacembelidae
54.	<i>Macrognathus pancalus</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Penwair	Mastacembelidae
55.	<i>Mastacembelus armatus</i> (Lacepede, 1800)	Wair	Mastacembelidae
56.	<i>Nandus nandus</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Dukkar	Nandidae
57.	<i>Notopterus notopterus</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Bhadar	Notopteridae
58.	<i>Ompak bimaculatus</i> (Bloch, 1794)	Waranja	Siluridae
59.	<i>Ompak pabda</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	Bolya	Siluridae
60.	<i>Wallago attu</i> (Bloch and Schneider, 1801)	Palan/savla	Siluridae
61.	<i>Bagarius yarelli</i> (Sykes, 1839)	Bodh	Sisoridae

Table 3: Summary of fish diversity recorded from Gondia district

Parameter	Observation
Total fish species recorded	61
Total families recorded	19
Dominant family	Cyprinidae
Species under Cyprinidae	27
Species under Bagridae	6

3.3 Gender pattern in membership of cooperative societies

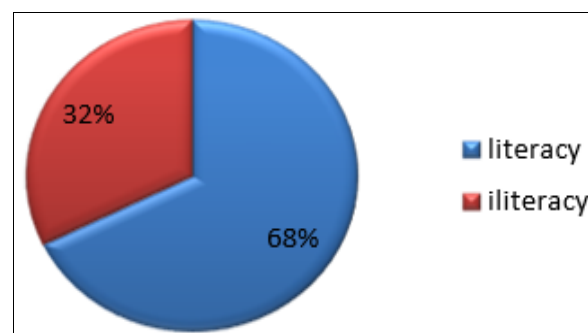
The survey of 45 fishermen cooperative societies showed low participation of women in fisheries institutions (Fig. 2). Out of 2, 116 registered members, only 248 were women, indicating that women's role in active fishing, cooperative decision-making, and institutional participation remains limited in the district. Low female participation has been reported in many traditional inland fisheries systems where fishing operations and formal society membership are dominated by men. However, increasing women's participation in post-harvest handling, value addition, marketing, and cooperative administration could strengthen both livelihoods and institutional effectiveness.

**Fig 2:** Gender pattern of membership in fishermen co-operative in Gondia District

3.4 Literacy status of fishers

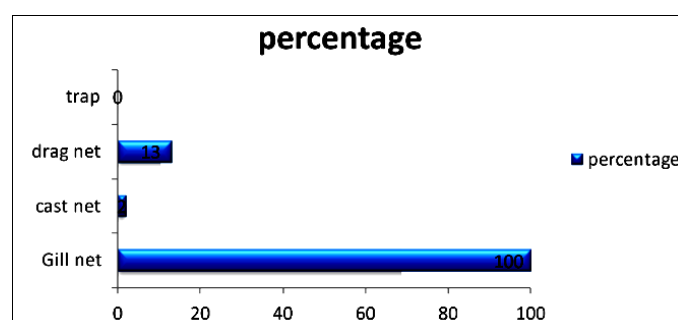
The survey indicated that literacy and access to information technology among cooperative members were low (Fig. 3). A large proportion of fishers had limited formal education and poor exposure to modern fisheries technologies. This constraint likely affects the adoption of improved fishery practices, record keeping, compliance with regulations, and access to government schemes. Low literacy among fishers

often reduces their ability to engage with technical training, digital governance, and financial systems. Therefore, fisheries extension programmes in Gondia district should emphasize practical, locally adapted training approaches rather than relying solely on written communication.

**Fig 3:** Literacy among fishermen of Gondia District

3.5 Fishing gears used

Gill nets were the most commonly used fishing gears in Gondia district (Fig. 4). Drag nets were used by a smaller proportion of societies, while cast nets and traps were used only occasionally. The predominance of gill nets suggests that reservoir and open-water fisheries form a major component of district fishing activity. The dominance of gill nets in inland fisheries is expected because they are versatile, relatively inexpensive, and effective for capturing a wide range of commercial fishes. However, excessive or unregulated use of small-mesh gill nets can affect juvenile fish and broodstock, thereby influencing sustainability. Regular monitoring of mesh size and fishing effort is therefore necessary.

**Fig 4:** Percentage of fishing gears used in Gondia District

3.6 Compliance with banned fishing regulations

The survey revealed that banned fishing regulations were followed by some cooperative societies, but not uniformly across the district (Fig. 5). Inconsistent compliance with closed-season or species-specific restrictions may affect fish breeding success and the long-term sustainability of fish stocks. Seasonal fishing bans are designed to protect spawning fish and juvenile recruitment. Weak adherence to such guidelines often reflects poor enforcement, economic dependence on continuous fishing, and limited awareness among fishers. Therefore, strengthening cooperative-based regulation, awareness campaigns, and monitoring mechanisms could improve compliance in Gondia district.

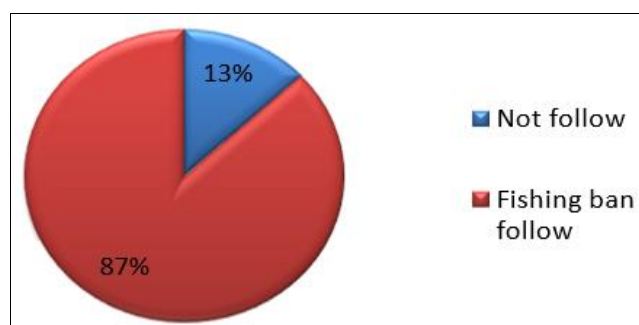


Fig 5: Banned fishing followed by co-operative member of Gondia district society.

3.7 Fish stocking practices

Most cooperative societies stocked their water bodies annually with Indian major carps and common carp, while some also stocked freshwater prawns and murels (Fig. 6). Stocking depended heavily on the availability of quality seed from nearby fish seed production centers such as Ambhora and Itiadoh, and in some cases seed was procured from other districts and neighboring states. Indian major carps were stocked by almost all societies, while exotic carps were stocked by many societies. *Channa* spp. and prawns were stocked only by a smaller proportion of societies. This indicates that district fisheries are largely enhancement-based and dependent on hatchery-produced seed. Such stocking practices can contribute to production gains, but they also require ecological caution to prevent imbalances in species composition and overdependence on a few cultured groups.

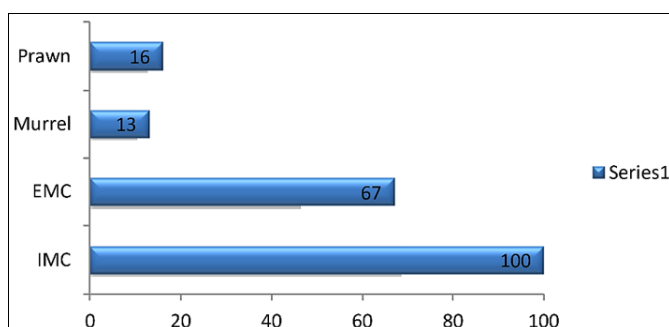


Fig 6: Fish stocked by co-operative societies of Gondia district

3.8 Loan utilization by societies

The study found that some cooperative societies had availed loans to support fisheries operations, including procurement of fish seed, nets, and other inputs. However, access to institutional credit appeared constrained for many groups due to uncertainties associated with seasonal income from fisheries. Credit remains an important factor in improving fisheries productivity and income. Without access to

affordable institutional finance, fishers may find it difficult to invest in stocking, gear improvement, and post-harvest infrastructure. Cooperative strengthening and easier linkage with formal banking systems could improve fisheries operations in the district.

3.9 Off-season livelihood activities

Fishing in Gondia district is generally carried out for only part of the year, especially in seasonal water bodies. During the off-season, fishermen relied on alternative livelihood activities. The survey showed that 42% of fishers were engaged in agriculture-related work, 48% in labor work, and 10% continued some form of capture fishery or related activity. This pattern highlights the seasonal nature of inland fisheries-based income in the district. Diversified livelihood portfolios are therefore essential for fishing communities. Future fisheries development programmes should consider integration with agriculture, value addition, and allied occupations to reduce seasonal vulnerability.

3.10 Overall fisheries management status

The findings indicate that Gondia district possesses strong inland fisheries potential supported by diverse fish fauna, increasing fish production, and the active role of cooperative societies. However, several management challenges remain, including low participation of women, poor literacy and limited access to technology among fishers, incomplete compliance with fishing bans, and dependence on stocking-based fisheries enhancement. The increasing fish production trend suggests that fisheries are developing, but sustainability will depend on balancing production enhancement with conservation of native fish diversity. The presence of tilapia and other exotic fishes also deserves careful monitoring because unmanaged introductions and proliferation of exotics may alter native fish assemblages over time. Similar concerns regarding fish diversity and fisheries management have been noted in earlier studies from Navegaon Bandh and other inland waters of the region.

4. Conclusion

Gondia district is endowed with substantial inland fisheries resources and supports a rich diversity of freshwater fishes. The present study recorded 62 fish species belonging to 18 families and showed that district fish production increased steadily from 2017-18 to 2021-22. Fisheries in the district are primarily supported by Indian major carps, exotic carps, catfishes, and murels, with gill nets being the dominant fishing gear. Fishermen cooperative societies are the principal institutions managing district fisheries, but they face several constraints including low female participation, poor literacy, inconsistent observance of fishing regulations, dependence on external seed supply, and limited financial and technical capacity. For sustainable fisheries development in Gondia district, scientific stock enhancement, regulation of fishing effort and mesh size, improved compliance with ban periods, stronger cooperative governance, fisher training, women's inclusion, and conservation-oriented fish biodiversity monitoring are needed. Such interventions would help improve both fish production and livelihood security while maintaining the ecological integrity of the district's freshwater ecosystems.

Conflict of Interest

Not available

Financial Support

Not available

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