

Fisherwomen get marketing assistance from BOBP-IGO

Some 40 women fish vendors of two fishing villages near Besant Nagar in south Chennai reeling from the tsunami have received some vital assistance from the BOBP — fish marketing equipment to enable them to resume their livelihood and feed their families. The equipment consists of an ice box, a weighing balance, an aluminium container, and an aluminium bucket.



“Battered by the tsunamis, they are up for the challenge” reported the Indian Express in its 8 February 2005 edition. For women fish vendor of the Besant Nagar fish market who had lost all their equipment during the tsunamis, the new materials provided by the Bay of Bengal Programme were nothing less than a fresh lease of life”.

Six hundred families live in the two villages — Orur Kuppam and Orur

Olcott Kuppam. Nearly a third of the houses and almost all of the craft and the gear in the villages were destroyed by the tsunami. With fishing craft from the beach nearby unable to go out to sea, the fisherwomen could earn some money only by buying fish from distant markets at Royapuram or Saidapet. The BOBP package,

decided on after a team from the Programme visited the villages, facilitated such fish purchase.

Said Anjalai, president of the co-operative society of women fish vendors, the Orur-Olcott Kuppam Meenavar Mahalir Sangam, “We lost our all because of the tsunami. Fishing has stopped at our villages. We have to travel far to buy and market fish. We did’nt have the most



basic implements to buy fish. This equipment was a boon, and very timely.”

Jeeva, another fish vendor, said, “It’s natural that we approached BOBP for assistance. We have known this project for a long time. We got a fish market from the Corporation at Besant Nagar with their help.”

The BOBP has been active in the two villages since the mid-1980s. It carried out fishing boat and gear trials with the fishermen; it coordinated with the Corporation of Madras and the Department of Fisheries on the proposal for a fish market at Besant Nagar near the fishing villages, after the women said that such a market was their dream, what they most wanted.

The market came into being in August 1990, some two years after BOBP engaged a social worker to help the women think through their problems. It encouraged them to meet the Commissioner of the Chennai Corporation to request a fish market, provided a design for the market through a consultant,

trained the women in financial management and in the basics of setting up, running and maintaining a co-operative society, and mobilized co-operation from several stakeholders.

The market had a difficult birth but was well received by the public – it was a regular and reliable source of fish in a hygienic environment. Some 40 fisherwomen, members of the society, sold fish at the market when it was launched, but the market gradually ran into problems, caused partly by divisions among fisherwomen. That the market still continues is a tribute to the doughty spirit of the women. BOBP-IGO plans to revitalise the market with the support of the Government of Tamil Nadu

Some 15 women sell fish in the market now. But nearly all the



original 40 members have received fish marketing equipment from the BOBP-IGO. “It gave us hope and help at a difficult time,” says Krishnaveni, one of the members of the society.

Ex-BOBP Staffer Helps Women Fish Vendors

The women fish vendors of Orur and Olcott Kuppam received some financial help this year from a former staffer of the BOBP- Mr Arne Andreasson, who was Development Adviser with the Programme in Chennai, and is now the Coordinator of the World Bank-funded Fourth Fisheries Project, Bangladesh.

Shocked by the tsunami and its impact on fisheries, Mr Andreasson paid a private two-day visit to Tamil Nadu in March 2005. He visited fishing communities and landing centers in Cuddalore, near the Marina in Chennai and at Royapuram. He also visited the fish market at Besant Nagar and met the women fish vendors there.

Mr Andreasson made a donation of US \$ 1,000 to the Orur-Olcott Meenava Mahalir Munnetra Sangam through the Rotary Club of Madras South. The money was handed over on behalf of the club to Anjalai and Krishna Veni, members of the sangam, at its meeting on March 22. The money, like the fish marketing equipment by BOBP-IGO, enabled purchase of fish by the women vendors from whole markets at Chintadripet and Royapuram.

Mr Andreasson wrote an article in a Swedish newspaper on the impact of the tsunami on fisherfolk communities in Tamil Nadu. The article provoked discussion among readers, particularly members of the Swedish Fisheries Union.

