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CHAPTER-19
IMPACT OF COVID – 19 ON THE FISHERIES
SECTOR

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Introduction:

'The COVID-19 will be here for a lot of time to come' quoted the Director-General of WHO (World Health Organisation). It has led to vast measures that are being implemented by the countries' worldwide to restrict its spread and provide time for the healthcare facilities to tackle the present scenario. Though food selling businesses, such as malls, markets, groceries and convenience stores and takeaway restaurants are deemed essential and remain operational, the measures taken to contain the COVID-19 outbreak have created an environment in which food accessibility could become more challenging. Although COVID-19 does not directly affect fish, the fisheries sector is still subject to indirect impacts of the pandemic through altering and fluctuating customer demands and market access or problems related to transport and border limits. This will affect the aquaculture sector and fish farmers' livelihoods, as well as the food security and nutrition for populations that greatly rely on fish for animal protein and essential nutrients. Simultaneously, uncertain perceptions in some countries have also led to a decreased rate of seafood consumption, which results in a massive fall in the price of fish products. This accentuates the need for clear communications regarding virus transmission mechanism and that it is not related to fish as a food. Value chains include local, regional and global markets. Primary activities in a fisheries or aquaculture supply chain are fishing, aquaculture production, processing, transport and wholesale-retail marketing. Each link has been

disrupted or susceptible or stopped by impacts arising from COVID-19 (Poudel *et al.*, 2020). If one producer-buyer-seller link is broken by disease or containment measures, the outcome will be a cascading chain of disruptions that will hurt the economy as a whole. On the other hand, when this chain is broken, there are 2 frequent outcomes: First, the fresh fish are not being available to the consumers and storage fishes are being flooded in the markets; secondly, the price hikes due to inadequate supply.

Fishing activity is reduced or brought to a halt because of the drop in demand and/ or prices:

There is already evidence of reduced fishing efforts throughout the country. For example, places that depend extensively on export markets or higher value species are likely to be significantly affected (Geoghegan *et al.*, 2018). Sanitary measures (physical distancing between crew members at sea, masks) can also make fishing challenging. Limited supplies of ice, gear and other essential requirements due to suppliers being closed also hinders the whole process. Suppliers are unable to provide inputs on credit and this also constrains fishing activities. Labour shortage is another problem as some crews consist of migrant workers who are having a tough time travelling from their homes. In addition, the uneven availability of equipment to ensure health security for crews is also a major issue. The unavailability of support systems to maintain the primary activity