

SPECIAL REPORT

Fate of Anguillid Eel Fishery of Indonesia during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Anguillid eel resource in Indonesia

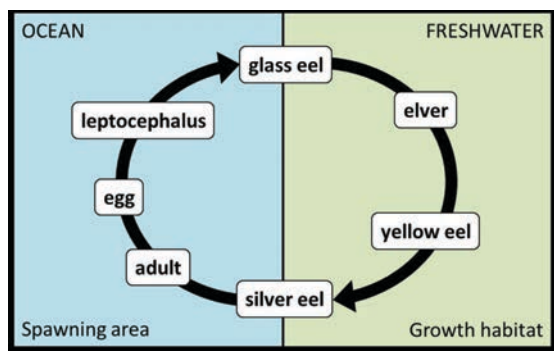
Indonesia has a vast area of inland waters which is about 276.0 million ha, comprising 223.0 million ha of rivers and floodplains, 1.8 million ha of lakes, 27.0 million ha of reservoirs, and 24.0 million ha of wetlands and swamp areas. The country's inland waters are inhabited by more than 1,300 freshwater fish species. Anguillid eel is one of the economically important freshwater fishes which is widely distributed all over the country. Anguillid eel fishery in Indonesia is thriving in several regions, namely: Bengkulu, Palabuhan Ratu, Cilacap, and Poso. Anguillid eel is a popular



Elver caught from Poso Lake in Central Sulawesi



Yellow eel caught from Seluma River in Bengkulu



Life cycle of anguillid eels showing the major stages

food in Japan, China, Korea, USA, Denmark, France, Italy, Belgium, and Germany. However, Indonesian people prefer not to eat this fish because of its snake-like appearance and slimy texture. Although majority of world's eel production is from aquaculture, all young eels (glass eels and elvers) used in aquaculture are caught from the wild. Consequently, the supply of eel resources for human consumption is completely dependent on wild catch.

Survey on the status of anguillid eel fishery

For the sustainable utilization and management of anguillid eel resources in the Southeast Asian region, SEAFDEC/



Glass eels capture activity in Cimandiri River in Palabuhan Ratu, West Java

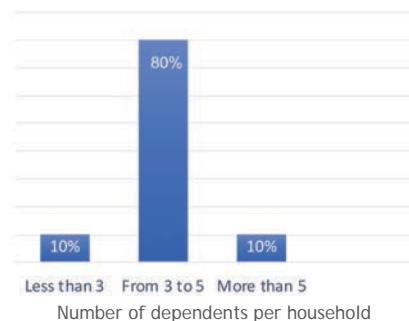
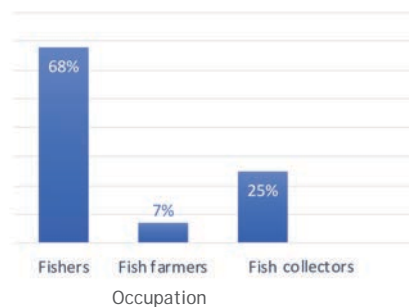
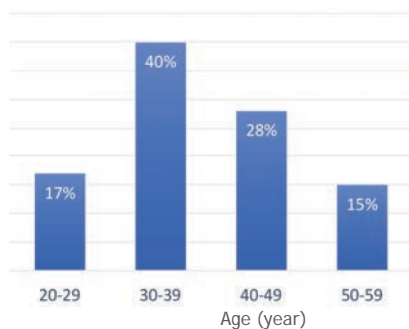
IFRDMD has undertaken several projects supported by the JTF and JAIF including “Enhancement of Sustainability of Catadromous Eel Resources in Southeast Asia” in 2015-2019, “Sustainable Utilization of Anguillid Eel in the Southeast Asia region” in 2020, “Enhancing Sustainable Utilization and Management Scheme of Tropical Anguillid Eel Resources in Southeast Asia” in 2017-2019, and “Development of Stock Assessment Method and Strengthening of Resources Management Measures on Tropical Anguillid Eels in ASEAN Region” in 2020. The projects were conducted in the ASEAN Member States where anguillid eel fishery is practiced. Moreover, the Policy Guidelines for Regional Conservation and Management of Tropical Anguillid Eels Resources in Southeast Asia was developed by SEAFDEC to propose a way of formulating and implementing effective regional management measures, as well as recommend the actions that should be taken for the sustainable utilization of tropical anguillid eels in the Southeast Asian region.

However, the current COVID-19 pandemic caused an unprecedented global socio-economic crisis including the fisheries and aquaculture sector. The Government of Indonesia has enforced a large-scale social restriction measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the country, which limited

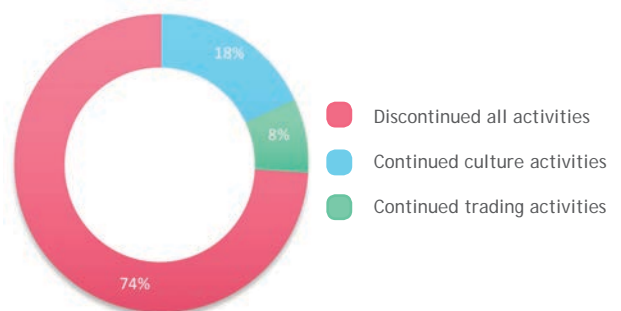
the logistics and transportation resulting in the decreased demand for anguillid eels. In this regard, IFRDMD conducted the rapid appraisal in 16-19 September 2020 to evaluate the impacts of the pandemic to the key stakeholders of anguillid eel fishery of Indonesia who were requested to answer the questionnaire through the WhatsApp social media application.

There was a total of 60 respondents between 20 and 59 years old who were mostly fishers, a few fish farmers, and fish collectors from the provinces of Bengkulu, West Java, Central Java, and Central Sulawesi. All of the respondents were heads of their households and the most of them had 3-5 dependents. Among the respondents, only two were women who were involved in capture fishing and aquaculture, which indicated that heavier activities in anguillid eel fishery are dominated by men. However, generally, the anguillid eel marketing and trade activities are performed mainly by women as fish collectors.

As a consequence of the COVID-19 restriction measures applied in the country, majority of the respondents ceased fishery and aquaculture activities, some continued their culture operations despite the price increase of feeds and other aquaculture inputs, while only a few continued the trading of anguillid eels. In order to augment their income, they shifted to catch, culture, or trade other freshwater fishes or do other jobs.



Profile of stakeholders providing responses to the questionnaire



Impacts of the COVID-19 to key stakeholders of anguillid eel fishery of Indonesia

Way Forward

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the supply chain of anguillid eels, and the key stakeholders suffered huge economic losses. The initial challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic is to restore the supply of anguillid eel seeds for culture to sustain the market chain and uphold the livelihoods of the people who depend on this fishery. Despite the challenges that they are facing, most of the respondents are expecting that the anguillid eel trade would recover soon after the pandemic. They hope that the price in the market would be stabilized as the demand for anguillid eels increase again with the resumption of operations of food services. While the COVID-19 situation has not yet improved, IFRDMD would continue to implement the project on anguillid eels particularly the conduct of data collection to monitor the production of eels from capture and aquaculture.

