Economic Status: Women Workers in Marginalized Small-Scale Aquaculture Sector

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Abstract: Fishing is a major industry in coastal states of India but still the coastal fish workers have been one of the most vulnerable groups among the poor in India. Fisheries are an important sector of food production, providing dietetic supplement to the food along with contributing to the agricultural exports and engaging about fourteen million people in different activities. With diverse resources ranging from deep seas to fresh waters, the country has shown constant increments in fish production since independence. Women, who constitute approximately half of India’s population (49%) play vital role in these fisheries. The contributions of the fisherwomen penetrate every aspect of postharvest handling, preservation, processing and marketing of seafood products and provide an integral link between producers and consumers. Increase in competition, decaying resources and complex working conditions make work challenging for the fisherwomen. Among fisherwomen mobility is limited; hence they need some eco-friendly technologies, which could provide additional income to the family. Women entrepreneurs need to be encouraged in the fishing industry. The focus of the paper is on the importance of the fisheries industry in these economies and the involvement of women in the fisheries industry. Women in most of these countries do not enjoy the basic human rights that their male counterparts enjoy. Issues pertaining to gender inequality in the fisheries sector, and solutions to overcome some of these issues are also discussed.

Key Words: Vulnerable Groups, Fishing, Fisherswomen, Eco-friendly technologies, Women entrepreneurs, Gender Inequality.

Introduction:

“Women in aquaculture successful in their own right they are making it happen”


Fish is especially important for the every segment of the population providing a cost-effective and easily reached source of protein and essential micronutrients. A large section of the population depends on fish resources (both marine and inland) for their livelihoods, employment and income. Fisheries sector contributes significantly to the national economy while providing a good source of revenue to approximately 14.49 million people in the country. Presently, fisheries and aquaculture contribute 1.04% of the national GDP and 5.34% of agriculture and allied activities. Fish trade is a traditional occupation that has been a means of livelihood for thousands in India with the majority of fish vendors being women. Unlike men, whose labour is largely confined to the sea, river or lake; fisher women vendors have to travel with their product to market places. They have to cooperate with both the public and the law. In the process, they are often forced to deal with in herited prejudices and problems of various kinds. Along with being engaged in household chores from dawn to dusk, fisherwomen play an important role in retailing, auctioning, sorting, grading, curing and drying, prawn peeling and collection of seaweed apart from hand-braiding and repair of nets.

The role of the women in fishing is largely relies on the socio-economic conditions of the households. Overall, the conditions and quality of life for women is deprived across different fishing groups and communities. This included long working hours, poor wages as compared to the men and in addition the burden of household maintenance. However various problems are faced by fisherwomen, still they expressed interest to learn new skills and attend trainings to improve their status in the fishing sector to empower themselves.

Objectives:

1. Examining the roles of women in the fisheries sector of the communities dependent on Fisheries.

2. Providing an analysis of the obstacles and the potential related to women’s contribution to the socio-economic development and diversification of these communities;
3. Identifying way and means for the promotion of equal opportunities for women in the fisheries sector.

4. Analysis and presentation of potential interventions to solve the problems and exploit the opportunities identified above, with a view to gender equality and socio-economic development.

**Role of Fisherwomen Working in Aquaculture: Andhra Pradesh**

Andhra Pradesh Limited role in capture fisheries like seed collection, clam collection handpicking of fish. Active participation in allied activities such as sorting, grading, fish salting and drying, fish loading and unloading, net mending, retail marketing and fish processing.

In the state of Andhra Pradesh, the main commercial activities of women in the fishing villages are fish drying, curing and fish marketing. Hand braiding of fishing nets is also an important activity in many fishing villages. In recent years, with the establishment of shrimp processing plants in Visakhapatnam and East Godavari districts, women are obtaining jobs in the shrimp processing industry in increasing numbers. In the East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh, women get employment in shrimp farms for 4 to 5 months in a year for activities like pond construction, seed collection and segregation, de-weeding of pond and hand picking of shrimp during harvest. Women do not participate in marine fish capture.

In a few places along the coast, women are seasonally engaged in collecting molluses and shells along with drying/selling the same in the local markets. A number of women cooperative societies have been established in Srikakulam district and the establishment of cooperatives in Visakhapatnam district are contemplated. The purpose of these cooperative societies is to organize women for hand braiding of fishing nets, supply of twine, etc.

The scope for further involvement of women in such activities as drying and curing of fish and hand braiding of fishing nets is limited; in the latter case, it has become difficult for women to compete with machine-made nets in commercial plants. The lack of educational facilities for women in small-scale fishing communities is the main handicap to greater participation by them.

**Methods, Sources And Areas Covered**

A team of fisheries socio-economists with knowledge of the role of women in fisheries throughout the India has prepared an appropriate template of the whole report. The template defined “Fisheries” as all aspects of the fish & seafood sector including capture, culture and up & downstream activities, categorised in the following sub-sectors listed below. In this regard, “Fishing” on the other hand, is the narrower activity of seagoing fish capture:

**Fishing** (commercial & small scale)  
**Aquaculture**

**Marketing & distribution**

**Processing**

**Administration, Management & Public sector**

**Other:** Significant other category

**Informal:** Unpaid, (e.g. Wives managing - Bookkeeping & Marketing)

The Main sectors investigated can be broken down into three broad areas economical, educational and sociological, with these areas significantly overlapping. Allowing an investigation which looks in to the how, where, why and why not the role of women in European fisheries.

- **Employment data**, including gender differentials, for each main discrete occupation within the fisheries sector i.e.: fishing, aquaculture, marketing distribution, processing, administration & management and informal (especially unpaid spouses support).

- **Legal and social status**: women’s legal position concerning involvement in the sector, and problems inherent in this.

- **Organisational**, concerning how women are organised within industry(e.g. unions), what formal support systems there are (e.g. childcare) and how education serves women in the sector.

- **Socio-cultural constraints**, resolved into three aspects – external social factors that affect women’s decisions, the social status (thus desirability) of fisheries occupation and “internal” psychological factors related to women’s interests aspirations and concerns.

**Women’s Involvement In Aquaculture Production In India**

In traditional fisheries women are not usually directly involved in fishing activities, either on account of the physical strain and the long hours away from home and family, or because of social taboos, customs, and beliefs which prohibit them from boarding fishing vessels. Women are thus confined to shore-based activities, such as fish handling, processing, distribution, marketing, and net-making/mending.

In contrast, the role of women in fish farming, especially in small fish farms, has long been predominant. Women take part in actual production in most types of aquaculture – brackish water or freshwater fish ponds, fish pens or fish cages - whether on an extensive, semi-intensive, or intensive level on a small, medium, or large scale.
and in various stages of fish farm development (planning, construction and actual operation), and from seed production to grow-out/rearing, harvesting, and post-harvest handling.

The scope and magnitude of women's participation in aquaculture production in India are influenced to a large extent by the level of aquaculture technology in a particular country vis-

a-vis the role and status of women in that society. The women farmers to learn boast of large pools of trained and skilled women fish farmers, technicians, extension workers, and professionals who are directly or indirectly involved in various capacities in fish production through aquaculture.

**Women’s employment in fisheries Sector:**

The following table makes some important points clearly, particularly regarding the very different levels of female involvement in the different fisheries sub-sectors. These are set out below:

(i) Women clearly play a very small part in **fishing per se**, (i.e. the capture fishery), with their representation in the workforce averaging, within a range of 0 to 7%. In short, their involvement is marginal in all countries

(ii) More women are involved in **aquaculture**, according to the available data. The average is the lower figure (for the Netherlands) is believed to be unrepresentative; possibly reflecting the fact that Dutch aquaculture mainly involves mussel culture, a seagoing activity more akin to fishing than farming. Indeed, as with much of this data, the generalised data inevitable disguises much regional variation, with aquaculture in regions like Galicia being a traditional female preserve.

(iii) As would be expected, **processing** is clearly the sub sector where women are most involved in fisheries, demonstrating a small majority of the workforce at 53%, but within range of 11 to 75%. However women are mostly 40 to 60% of the workforce, with only Greece (11%) having markedly less than 40% female involvement.

(iv) Finally, women’s involvement in the **management and administration** element of the sector is, at 39% perhaps higher than might have been expected in what has notoriously been a male dominated preserve. However, this does not necessarily mean that women have made inroads into the senior management roles, and anecdotal evidence suggests that indeed women are generally not represented at the higher levels. Indeed, it is legitimate to question what the 39% represents. In some cases, it is the public sector (regulation, research & training) that predominates in the data, and here conscious efforts to achieve equal opportunity have clearly borne fruit. The position in the commercial sector would seem to be one of less female emancipation, reflecting the still largely traditional structure of the industry.

**Fisherwomen Empowerment:**

Empowerment is a process of acquiring rights, self development and self realization through independent decision making. Thus when we speak of women empowerment, it means providing social, economical, political, educational rights, so as to give them a status in par with men. The average Indian fishing family today finds it difficult to earn a livelihood throughout the year. Therefore, the vast potential available among the unemployed fisherwomen needs to be tapped, which can be done by making them capable of doing something remunerative on their own. This however requires that the women are motivated, have a degree of awareness, the ability to think critically and take decisions and above all possess a measure of self esteem. This power has to be acquired, sustained and exercised.

**Problems of Fisher Women:**

1. **Education and training:** The low literacy rate amongst women restricts them to utilize world class skills required in competitive business environment. Besides, extension services are dominated by males, and male-female contact is not allowed socially.

2. **Poor Housing and Sanitation:** The fishing villages are often remote and inaccessible, and with unproductive lands that are also subject to sea erosion. Basic facilities such as drinking water and health services are often missing.

3. **Health:** Nutritional Food is a vital factor determining health. Fisher women in India generally suffer from malnutrition and dietary imbalances.

4. **Physical mobility:** Women in some fishing communities are not permitted to work outside the home or with men folk. This is closely linked to religion, class or caste to which the household belongs. Such socio-cultural restrictions limit women’s contribution to household income and narrow down options for employment and income sources.

5. **Access to credit :** In general, women have less access to credit or financing sources due to the various socio-cultural restrictions and low literacy. Lack of possession over assets makes it difficult to procure loans from banks/financial institutions.

6. **Marketing Problems:** Fisher women face the problem of marketing their products. Lack of marketing strategies, no liaison with SHGs in interior urban markets, lack of imagination and
cooperation constrains their marketing efforts.

7. Entrepreneur Development Programme: Entrepreneurs Development Programmes provided by the government remain more in theory than in practice for many reasons. Due to marketing problems, the SHG members have not attained self-sufficiency in entrepreneurial activities.

8. Impact of technology: The introduction of machines in fishing industry seems to have benefited fisherwomen in some areas, as reported by Gulati (1979); it has had an adverse effect in many other parts of the country.

Opportunities for women in fisheries could be enlarged in the field of integrated aquaculture, fishery estates, marine products processing, manufacture and export development, management of fishery infrastructure, marketing and export as well as in research and technology development.

Benefits of Women’s Participation in Fisheries:

On the contrary, women’s participation is changing with the mounting pressure on land and water resources, environmental degradation, out-migration of male family members and increasing rural poverty.

- Benefits women through an increase in household income and improvement in nutrition (practical needs/efficiency goal);
- Helps women gain control over their own livelihoods and improve their status;
- Both within the household and the community (strategic needs/empowerment);
- Improved access to income and livelihood options;
- Higher household income due to added human capital inputs in aquaculture;
- Increased participation in various decision-making processes within the family.

To ensure better involvement of women in aquaculture development as well as improve the economic condition of women, the following aspects are to be considered:

- A better understanding of the existing gender relations in the community and the household must be gained by institutions/organizations working for the development of aquaculture;
- Participatory technology development offers more scope to incorporate women's experiences. Successful cases of women's involvement in aquaculture can be emphasized.

- Aquaculture training and extension efforts should be improved by taking a more holistic approach that encompasses women's time use, household responsibilities, literacy levels, as well as all aspects of their daily chores;
- Development of indicators to ensure that the involvement of women is monitored on a regular basis so that their activities or participation in aquaculture can be refocused regularly;
- Even though women are the ones who do the retail marketing of fish in many of the Southeast Asian countries, their information on market is very limited. A mechanism is necessary to expose women to more extensive market information and to link them to a wider market network.

Policies and Strategies:
The will to improve the socio-economic status of women in our country and their representation in all spheres of activity has been clearly reflected in the several programmes for fisherwomen as target groups. The regional and national fisheries development policy makers must also consider women as key participants in coastal aquaculture and in developing strategies for the implementation of specific programmes.

Consideration may be given to the following issues:
1. To provide formal and non-formal education to fisherwomen.
2. Awareness for social and economic upliftment.
3. Training programmes for improvement of skills and enterprise development.
4. Leasing of water bodies to women for independent work process.
5. Establishment of demonstration farms/backyard hatcheries by women.

Conclusion:
Fisheries are a key sector of Indian economy witnessing progressive and drastic changes over the years, both in production and marketing. The goal for women in fisheries is to make them self-reliant and productive for improving their own and family’s living standard. Increasing entrepreneurial activities in post-harvest segment of fisheries for women may provide more and more employment opportunities. Fisherwomen should be provided adequate knowledge and training on awareness of natural disasters and its management. Computer based training module should be designed for employment opportunities. Both socially and economically is essential. Hence skills and use of appropriate technologies will enable them to be empowered socially and economically. This can
only be done through education about nutrition, health, sanitation, and child care, and training on current technologies and best practices techniques along with financial assistance.

References:
4. Summary of the report “The Role of Women in Fisheries”