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REVIEW ARTICLE

STUDY ON THE STATUS OF FISHERWOMEN HEALTH AND OTHER PERSPECTIVES: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Women in fishing communities play multidimensional roles that include livelihood, household, reproductive and community ones. Their involvement in fisheries value chains are often considered as invisible by poor social acceptance due to gender biasness, poor environmental condition due to unfavorable climate, Diseases due to *Lactococcus garvieae*, HIV and AIDS are responsible for their poor health issue, poor economic issue due to deprivation from a fair price of work, poor technological issues due to use of heavy instruments causes improper handling for women. But agencies like DRWA, FAO, ICSF, ICAR are highlighting issues of women in fisheries, supporting the role of women in fisheries and enhancing their participation in decision-making processes through programs and policies like WIF and NAIP for development of these women.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, women in fishing communities play multidimensional roles that include livelihood, household, reproductive and community ones. Their involvement in fisheries value chains are often considered as invisible inspite of being active in a wide range of harvest and post-harvest activities both in capture and culture fisheries. It is estimated that out of the total population depending on capture fisheries, 47 per cent are women (World Bank, 2012). The female workforce, particularly in the small scale fisheries sector tends to be high. In aquaculture, one of the fastest growing primary production sector, women's contributions are increasing proportionately (Sudhakara *et al.*, 2003). Women are mostly engaged in peeling, trading, processing and various other activities in the post-harvest sector of fisheries. The Socio Economic Evaluation and Technology Transfer Division (SEEITD) of Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), Kochi was entrusted to conduct a study of coastal fisherwomen in Kerala as a part of the National Agricultural Technology Project (NATP) of "Studies on fisherwomen in coastal ecosystem of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala". It is an Inter-Institutional effort as the Acharya N.G.Ranga Agricultural University (ANGRAU) of Andhra Pradesh, College of Fisheries, Mangalore and CMFRI, Cochin are involved and a multidisciplinary approach is adopted to assess the status, needs and empowerment of fisherwomen (Sathiadhas *et al.*, 2002).



Women and poor social acceptance

Srivastava (1985) stated that all women, irrespective of status of the family provide 14 to 18 hours of productive physical labour in different chores. women spent long hours for performing time consuming and labour intensive works in

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fisheries sector (Srivastava 1985). These heavy workloads leave very little time for rest, leisure or the pursuit of other activities. Fish selling is almost exclusively the domain of women. Despite their pervasive involvement, women's invaluable contribution is often overlooked and undocumented, such that women do not benefit from adequate working conditions, facilities, training and access to information. Although women contribute significantly for the economy as well as the disposable household income, their socio-economic status in society is still lagging far behind men. The high degree of wage disparity between men and women for doing the same job indicates the general level of exploitation and gender inequalities. According to Dehadrai (2002), women are remaining as 'invisible farmers' despite being major producers of food in terms of value, volume and hours worked in agriculture and allied activities (Dehadrai 2002).

Poor environmental status for women fisherfolk

Women are important from the livelihood, food and nutritional security point of view at the household (micro level) and the resource use, sustainability and value addition point of view at the regional and national levels (meso and macro levels). Besides the actual jobs they are engaged in, the larger environmental, socio-cultural and policy framework within which they are employed also have an impact on their contributions to households and communities. It has been observed that the impacts of societal and other changes tend to be more severe on women. As has been observed in the case of climate change impacts by Ovstegard (2010), women and men are differently affected by shortage in natural resources like water (Ovstegard *et al.*, 2010). Sumagaysay (2011) observes that the unpredictability of weather, as a result of climate change, has affected fish drying activities with women's labour increasing and incomes declining. These are but a few examples of how environmental changes have affected women's roles (Sumagaysay 2011).

Indian scenario of Fisherwomen

In India, women constitute about 50% of the population and comprise one-third of the labour force. Women contribute significantly to the fishery sector of the Indian economy (Ashaletha *et al.*, 2002). Women are more numerous than men in processing (57%), the most industrialized component of fisheries related activities, where they represent 32% of the total, while they account for only 5% of the total in fishing (Barbaroux *et al.*, 2012). In fish processing factories surveyed in India, 60% of workers were young women (Madhu 1989). In Tamil Nadu, women engage themselves in seaweed collection in addition to the traditional jobs of fish curing, marketing, net making and prawn seed collection, where the ratio of women to men is 4:1. In Andhra Pradesh, the main occupation of women include collecting fish, and molluscan shells in addition to their contribution in fish drying, curing, marketing, shrimp processing and net making. In Maharashtra women play a major role in fish marketing and control the entire fisheries economy revolving around Mumbai. In Lakshadweep, particularly Minicoy, the major fishery products known as masmin, riha, and akru of tuna are produced mainly by women (A Review - Women's Fisheries on the East Coast of India –

BOBP REP/97, Orissa State Focus Paper 2005-06). The Daily routine of a fish trading woman of Edava, Kollam district of Kerala who purchases her fish from a traditional landing centre and sells at local market reveals the magnitude of strain in her day-today life (Meynen and Wicky 1989).

International scenario of fisherwomen

In West Africa, as much as 80% of seafood is marketed by women. Generally, women in Asia, especially those from fisheries households, participate actively in many fisheries activities, including aquaculture. However, the lower status accorded to women in many Asian societies means that their contribution to fisheries is undervalued and unrecognized. Some women participate directly in fishing activities with their family members in lakes, rivers and streams, they also cook and preserve fish for domestic purposes (Barbaroux *et al.*, 2012).



Fisherwomen and Diseases

The first case was described of hip prosthetic infection due to *Lactococcus garvieae* with a patient of 71-year-old woman fishmonger, developed a hip infection 7 years after total hip arthroplasty. The origin of infection was possibly due to the manipulation or intake of seafood or fish contaminated with *Lactococcus garvieae* (Furutan *et al.*, 1991). *L. garvieae* is responsible for septicemia in various fish species (yellow tail, rainbow trout, gray mullet, giant freshwater prawns) and for mastitis in ruminants. Emergence of *L. garvieae* zoonotic diseases has been partly attributed to intensive aquaculture practice. However, the role of *L. garvieae* in human infections has not been clearly established, with few reported cases (Furutan *et al.*, 1991). In the last decade evidence has emerged suggesting that in many countries fisherfolk, as an occupational group, are at greater risk to HIV and AIDS than the general adult population. This high vulnerability has been explained in terms of the lifestyles associated with fishing and related occupations, such as fish processing and trading. Women in fishing communities, often engaged in fish processing and trading and providing food and lodging in fishing settlements, are portrayed as being in subordinate social and economic positions and prey to sexual exploitation by cash-rich fishermen. There is a danger in such lifestyle summaries that fisherfolk are characterized as reckless risk takers with a reckless attitude to the chance of contracting HIV (Elizabeth Westaway *et al.*, 2007).

Socio-economic issues

The socio-economic study showed all the households of Anjilikkad and The kkumbhagam villages where women are engaged in works related to clam fisheries. For picking clam, they go to backwaters in their own canoes at about 3 o'clock in early morning. After collecting clam, they came back by about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. They wash the clam and boil it with a little quantity of saline water either on the banks of the backwaters or in the backyards of their house. Boiling helps to open up the shell valves, and then they pick out the meat. This meat they either supply to traders or take themselves to some local market at A roof or Edakochi for selling According to them, on an average they can earn about Rs.200/- per day. The shells kept aside, also will be sold out once in a while and fetch them some income. Its price will be decided according to its size, this monopoly right always deprives a fair price to the real collectors of clam (Sathiadhas Rand Femeena Hassan 2003).

Poor health issues

A long hour of monotonous work also causes specific health hazards to fisherwomen depending on the type of work. At Anjilikkad area 33% of women engaged in clam fisheries are suffering with backache. As they are exposed to smoke, they are also suffering with headache (19%). Because of hard work 21% of women engaged were having myalgia. During their hard work, they are not caring about the diet. Hence it was observed that 17% of women engaged in clam fisheries are found to have anemia. On prolonged working, those who are going for clam picking suffer problems with sight and hearing (Sathiadhas Rand Femeena Hassan 2003).

Poor technological issues

Women engaged in various fishery occupations are technologically marginalised to a greater extent e.g. in clam fishery a metal teathed dragging net (*Palli*) for collecting clam is introduced which is very heavy and women can not handle it. As a result the male workers go to deeper areas and collect huge quantities in less time outsmarting the women clam collectors. The negative impact of the technological changes on the small-scale entrepreneurs is often ignore. The fish trading women face severe competition from not only the men folk who use two wheelers in domestic marketing but also the agents of the export companies resulting in the non availability of quality finfish's which commands high consumer preference in local markets. Currently, they also face the same fate of the net makers who have almost vanished from the scene.

Agencies involvement in development of fisherwomen

Under the Network project on "Capacity building of coastal fisherwomen through post harvest technology in fisheries", the Directorate of Research on Women in Agriculture (DRWA) created a Model Fish Drying Unit at Penthakota, Puri, Odisha and observed that fish drying is a major activity in the coastal districts of Odisha, carried out mainly by small-scale fisherwomen (A Review - Women's Fisheries on the East Coast of India –BOBP REP/97, Orissa State Focus Paper 2005-06). Studies conducted by FAO's Fishery Industry Division

and Food Policy and Nutrition Division have shown that women's involvement in fisheries and aquaculture activities include pond cleaning, fertilising, feeding the fish, fish capture, fish selling, etc. Since 2003, the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) has promoted efforts to improve the profile of, and understand the challenges and opportunities facing, small-scale fishing communities in inland and marine waters (Upare and Lolita V. Villareal 2003). Tamil Nadu and Kerala had shown that 51 per cent of fisherwomen were malnourished (Upare and Lolita V. Villareal 2003). The Central Institute of Fisheries Education (CIFE) work on "Fisherwomen and livelihoods: An ergonomics perspective" during 2003-2006, was aimed at micro activities and there were indications that the women fishers might be facing a number of occupational problems, including the ergonomically unsuitability of occupational and household tools, resulting in health issues. Action research had been attempted through a project on 'Coastal Zone Management through specific involvement of women and children' at Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT), Cochin implemented during 2004-07 (Khader *et al.*, 2006). In the National Agricultural Innovation Project (NAIP) of ICAR on 'Visioning policy Analysis and Gender' (V-PAGE), gender perspectives are being analysed with respect to fisheries policies (Khader *et al.*, 2005).

Programs for women fisherfolk

Issues relating to women in fisheries have been a matter of concern to the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) ever since it was formed. Highlighting issues of women in fisheries, supporting the role of women in fisheries and enhancing their participation in decision-making processes have always been high on the agenda of ICSF (ICSF 2010). The Women in Fisheries (WIF) programme of ICSF has evolved a feminist perspective on fisheries that connects with the larger feminist critique of development. It critiques development models that benefit the few at the expense of the majority (particularly poor women); increase the vulnerability of local communities and destroy their means of livelihood; and undervalue and overexploit natural resources. The WIF programme has been highlighting and valorizing -- through workshops, publications, studies and through various activities in the ICSF website -- the vital role that women play in fisheries and fishing communities. The major programmes undertaken by ICSF on women in fisheries are (1) role of women in fisheries; (2) role of women in aquaculture; (3) status of women; (4) recognition and policy; (5) development initiatives; (6) globalization; (7) struggles and movements; and (8) women and resources management ⁽¹⁸⁾.

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