

A STUDY ON THE PROBLEMS OF WOMEN FISH VENDORS IN THOOTHUKUDIDISTRICT

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Abstract

Despite the enormous increase in the fisheries population there still exist poverty and financial instability in the life of fisherfolk in Tamil Nadu. They are at the lowest level of their profile in terms of their socio-economic conditions. Fisherfolk is almost neglected in the plan periods. Allotment to this vulnerable section is almost nil in the Government budgets. If this is being the case for the fishing community, the women from this smaller population escape the eyes of policymakers. Women play a key role in the development of the fisheries sector in addition to their role of sole household managers in most fisher families. Although the involvement of women is limited in capture fisheries, their supportive role in active fishing has increased manifold with the advent of mechanization and enhancement of multi-dayfishing in marine fisheries. Women fish vendors are a small portion of this fisherfolk who believe in building up their status and giving education to their children by way of their hard work. Though these fish vendors work hard and are supported by the Government by way of financial inclusiveness there is no prosperity and development in the life of this section. The socio-economic and cultural backwardness of the fisherfolk should be analyzed from the point of view of their income and expenditure pattern. The present study is an attempt to analyze the various issues related to women fish vendors in Thoothukudi District. A total of seventy-five fish vending women were selected for the study and the collected data were shown in percentage.

Keywords: vendors, fisher women, marine fishing

Introduction

Fishing has been one of the oldest economic activities of the human race. It comes next to agriculture. Fish and other seafood constitute an integral part of a wholesome food provision. Especially, fishes of several varieties serve as tasty and healthy food with protein and fat content. The 'omega' a chemical element found in fish has immense medicinal value. Experts believe that such properties of fish could be consumed even by persons having heart problems. They have both nutritive and curative powers. Fish has a curative culture of creditable value. In India, many good and rare varieties of fish are found. 'Prawn' seems to be

the queen of fishes. They enjoy the international market and earn the most precious foreign exchange commendably. Millions of people all over the world have been profitably engaged in fishing and fish trading over the years. In a sense, fish and fisherfolk are together and inseparable to a great extent. They go to the sea, stay, and search, catch fish, spend even nights, take risks and bear uncertainties and venture bravely and rewardingly. Still, the fruits of their struggle around water do not always reach and rejoice the men and women. Many hurdles and riddles seem to prevail and persist. It is a real problem and a paradox too.

Fishing has been a traditional occupation for a sizable section of the population. The economic conditions of these fishermen mainly depend on the fish catches. Fisheries development is essential, both as a means of improving food production and as a means of improving the quality of diet in most developing countries. As a source of protein, vitamins, and essential minerals, fish provides an ideal supplement to the inhabitants of many. There are varieties of fish and they are classified according to their shape and size. Fishing is not a mode of earning regularly throughout the year. Due to the natural calamities and government bans it is stopped for a certain period. During this period, the people go to neighboring states for fishing or they involve in fishing-related activities such as net repair. Fish Marketing is done on a high level during the seasons. In the off-season, the fishermen suffer a lot to meet their personal and family expenses. Fishermen also save during seasons and they are able to overcome the difficulties for the rest of the year. The economic status of women fish vendors is very pathetic. The majority of the women fish vendors are the single earning member of the family and they face a number of problems relating to finance as well as their social implications.

Women fish workers in India, as in other parts of the world, play critical roles within the fisheries and fishing communities, roles that are often not recognized or supported. Women are particularly active in post harvest fisheries in marine fishing communities in India, for example, women comprise about 75% of those engaged in fish marketing. They contribute in significant ways to the food security needs of a diverse range of consumers. Women are thus the primary players in processing, marketing and selling the catch. After the fish has landed, it is women who take charge of the catch and sell the fish for money and food; Contributing to household incomes and food security, and to the local economy. The present study attempts to analyze the role of women fish vendors in the Thoothukudi district. Women are risk bearers which is a natural trait of an entrepreneur.

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Objectives:

To analyze the market activities of women fish vendors in the study area. To find out the problems faced by the women fish vendors.

To suggest policies for the promotion of women fish vendors in the Thoothukudi district

Methodology

The present research has considered the Thoothukudi district in the study area since it is

one of the lengthiest coasts in Tamil Nadu. In addition, fisheries are the major source of employment in the coastal economy and it also consists of different types of activities in fisheries ranging from marketing and dry fishing to salt making.

Both primary and secondary data are required for this study. Primary data related to the age, education, family size, income and expenditure pattern, assets and savings, and also the status of fisherwomen have been collected from selected sample Respondents of the study area. The size of the sample was restricted to 75.

The required secondary data are obtained from the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, the District Collectors office, CMFRI, and the office of the Assistant Director of Fisheries in the mandapam camp

THE ROLE OF FISHERIES IN THE INDIAN ECONOMY AND IN NATIONAL FOODSECURITY

India stands second in the world in total fish production, after China, with a production of 7.3 mntonnes in 2007 (Source: Fish stat, FAO, 2009). The annual per capita consumption of fish in India was estimated at 4.8 kg in 2003. 1. Inland fisheries are especially important for food security as almost all production goes for human consumption 2. Fish is especially important for the economically weaker sections of the population, providing a cheap and accessible source of protein and essential micronutrients 3. A large section of the population also depends on fish resources (both marine and inland) for their livelihoods, employment, and income. Currently, 14 mn people are estimated to be employed in the fisheries sector, which contributes 1.07 percent of India's gross domestic product (GDP) 4. Fish vending is a traditional occupation that has been a means of livelihood for thousands in India, with the majority offish vendors being women. Fish vendors engage in their trade-in various ways: they procure their fish directly from landing centers, where they participate in daily auctions of the catch; they buy from tradersand merchants, or they buy from the wholesale markets for resale at retail/local markets. Vendors also carry out value addition by sorting, grading, cleaning, and icing the fish 8. Fish may be sold as either (a) fresh fish that is stored in ice and sold in local or distant markets or door-to-door by vendors, or (b) salted,dried or smoked fish, which is sold in local markets or to merchants who take it to other markets once it is processed; such processing is usually done by women using traditional methods.

Types of fish vendors

Fish vendors can be broadly classified under the following categories: 1) Stationary vendors who vend on a regular basis at specific locations: Many vendors sell in designated wholesale or retail markets. They often transport the fish from the landing center to these markets in trucks or mini-vans, which they hire. Some buy from wholesale markets and sell at retail markets, while some others are wholesale suppliers themselves. Vendors may also procure fish from the landing sites for sale at roadside markets ('natural markets'), where they have been traditionally congregating and vending fish for years. Many fish vendors sell fish at the landing sites themselves— at harbours and beaches. There is thus considerable variation in the scale of operations of stationary vendors—ranging from petty sellers who barter fish in exchange for edible items such as sweet corn, sweets, and fruits (or vice versa), to those who are large wholesalers.

2) Peripatetic vendors who walk from place to place to sell their fish: These are usually women fish vendors who purchase fish directly at auctions that take place at the

village/wholesale markets/landing centers and sell fish door-to-door, traveling on foot and carrying their fish in bamboo baskets or aluminum vessels. They are a major source of fish supply to consumers within, and close to, coastal areas.

3) Mobile vendors who move around on bicycles or motorized vehicles: This type of fish vending, which is very common in states such as Orissa, primarily involves men. These vendors arrive at the landing centers from different villages and purchase fish at auctions at the village/wholesale markets/landing centers, for sale back in their villages. They also sell fish door-to-door. Apart from this, many fish vendors use other means to sell their fish. In Goa, for example, where tourism is the backbone of the local economy, vendors have arrangements with hotels and restaurants to sell fish to them directly. This ensures daily sales and an assured income.

PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN FISH VENDORS

The nature of the product handled by women fish vendors causes a certain stigma that fishermen themselves do not generally face. Unlike men, whose labour is largely confined to the sea, river, or lake, fish vendors have to travel with their products to marketplaces. They have to interact with the public and the law. In the process, they are often forced to deal with inbred prejudices and problems of various kinds.

The following are some of the key problems they face:

1) Distances and lack of basic facilities at harbours and landing centers: With greater mechanization and motorization, harbours and fish landing centers have become more centralized. Women vendors thus have to travel long distances to access fish. This may even mean staying overnight at harbours and landing centers, in order to be present for the early morning fish landing and auctions. Transportation to landing sites/harbours is sometimes unreliable, and basic facilities (toilets, storage, lights, waiting areas, night shelters) are absent. Under these circumstances, women often find themselves vulnerable to sexual abuse and harassment.

2) Poor access to credit, exorbitant interest rates: Technology-induced changes to the nature of fishing operations have also meant larger catches. Women, with poor access to credit and capital, are rarely able to compete with large-scale traders, and commission and export agents. To be able to access fish even in small quantities, they have to procure credit from middlemen and moneylenders, often at exorbitant rates of interest.

3) Lack of public transport to markets: While a few women sell the fish at the landing center or harbour itself, for the rest, the next major challenge after procurement is to transport the fish to the marketplace. As the distances involved may be considerable, women need to use some form of transport. In many situations, vendors are usually denied access to public transport, given the nature of the product they are dealing with. This means hiring autorickshaws, or other forms of transport, a significant expense in itself. Male fish vendors, with access to their own transport, are at a comparative advantage.

4) Lack of ice and proper storage facilities: Fish is a highly perishable commodity, and if vendors are to prevent spoilage and get a better price, they need to preserve the fish. They need access to ice and iceboxes. During the peak season, when ice is in short supply, it is often monopolized by large traders and intermediaries.

5) Problems at marketplaces: At the market itself, vendors face other kinds of problems. Fish vending spaces are either not recognized or just do not exist. Vendors are often harassed into paying 'informal taxes' in order to continue vending fish at a particular spot.

With the absence of legitimate vending zones, those vending fish on city pavements and other areas are perceived as encroachers on public spaces. They are constantly harassed and threatened with eviction by the police and civic authorities.

6) **Poor market infrastructure:** Where there are existing markets, basic facilities for storing, processing, and selling fish; clean toilets; access to potable running water; and adequate waste disposal measures are usually not available. Such facilities are essential for the hygienic handling of fish, for the health and wellbeing of vendors, for consumer health, and for enabling women to engage in their occupation in a dignified manner. Given the important role and contribution of women fish vendors, it is indeed unfortunate that the majority of them continue to struggle with such problems on a daily basis.

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Problems faced by women fish vendors in Thoothukudi district

Problems	No of Respondents	Percentage
Health problems		
Leg pain	18	24.00
Stomach and head pain	15	20.00
Body tired	42	56.00
Total	75	100.00
Marketing problems		
Natural calamities	18	23.33
Competition	28	40.00
Wastage	17	21.67
Theft	12	15.00
Total	75	100.00
General Problems		
Low income	25	33.33
Long travel	8	10.67
Low price	11	14.67
Seasonal	31	41.33
Total	75	100.00

Suggestions

- The literacy level of women fish vendors in this region is very low. Nonformal education must be provided in these areas and voluntary social workers can be involved in these programmes.
- Fishing being a seasonal occupation with highly fluctuating incomes, the women fish vendors have little money even to meet their normal food requirements. Hence the fisherwomen may be encouraged in rearing goats, chickens, or grow vegetables in their houses, to supplement their family income.
- Alternative and supplemented employment opportunities are to be created to overcome the hardship experienced by the fisher people during the ban period.
- The price fluctuations affect the women fish vendors. So, the government should control the price in an effective way.
- Government should help the women fish vendors to get loan facilities with a low rate of interest from banks easily.

Conclusion:

The women fish vendors of the artisanal fisheries belong to one of the poorest groups in the coastal rural areas. Fishing and fishery-related activities require much physical labour and the fisherwomen are almost involved in all fishery-related activities in the study area. Fish vending provides employment and livelihood to lakhs of people, primarily women. Steps need

to be taken in an integrated manner, drawing on available policy and legislative frameworks, and on the steps already being taken by State and Central governments and their institutions, to support this important segment of the population. Existing gaps in policy and implementation must be systematically addressed. They contribute significantly towards their family income. Therefore, society and the government should take measures to remove these obstacles, which affect the life of the women fish vendors, especially during the ban period. Next, the socio and infrastructural facilities have also been developed in the coastal villages to a greater extent to the growth of the economy.

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