Sustainable Alternate Livelihood Avocations for Coastal Women in India

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Introduction

Fisheries from the major source of employment, income and livelihood for most of the people inhabiting the coastal region. Women in fisheries are in general labelled as imperceptible workers as their contributions are not adequately apprehended and realized. Fishing in India is the mainstay of men but women too play a major role in pre and post harvest activities. The fishermen's population in the coastal villages of India is around 3.52 million out of which 49 per cent are women (CMFRI, Census, 2005). Fisherwomen actively involve themselves in different activities and thereby supplement their family income. It was observed that women even migrate to nearby places to gain employment. But, their level of migration is primarily hampered by the social system. More over, women have a propensity to take up inherent traditional activities rather than innovative activities. They also depend on their closer environment for their livelihood and most of the works they do are confined within their environment. Unlike men they cannot stretch out to far of places for gaining employment because they shoulder the family responsibilities and hence their economic oriented activity too is very limited.

National Experience

Women also had a major contribution in marketing fresh fish and processing. Due to the growth of the industrial fleet and the expansion of domestic and foreign markets bigger entrepreneurs with capital have entered the sector, as financiers, export agents, and they control the marketing chain for fish, especially higher value fish, as seen in India (Salagrama 2002). With the advent of net making technology, a substantial number of net making women were displaced. In Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu, India, the introduction of these machines reportedly led to the displacement of 20,000 women. (ICSF, 1997 and Shah 2002). In Kerala activities such as net making and marketing, women are being marginalised due to increasing mechanization, commercialization and centralization of fish landing (Krishna, 2000).

Bhatta (1998) made a study on the role of fisherwomen in fish marketing in the Mangalore city of Karnataka and indicated that development and commercialization of marine fisheries in Karnataka made the women to face competition from bulk buyers in the landing centre and have lost their traditional monopolistic power over the retail trade. Fisherwomen in any work sector can be found occupying the position of a sub category or performing supportive roles. In all landing centres women engaged in fish drying collects small sized by catch. They by catches fetch very low price and earns a poor profit margin for women (Ashaleetha et.al, 2000). The working condition for most of the fisherwomen is deplorable whether it is market or a peeling shed. As reported by Arpita (2000) complaints of arthritis, skin disorders back pain are common among the peelers.

Another recent innovation which has adversely affected and role and status of fisherwomen was the introduction of the auction system. In small traditional fishing villages in India, for example, women fish traders has been rendered redundant when auctions were introduced. Owing to non-profitability and non-viability of such fish trade business, most fisherwomen had to give up fish marketing, thereby further eroding their economic status within the family (Anbarasan, 1985).

Since fishing is commercial and prone to technological advancements it may still unfavourably influence the role of women and hence they should be provided with alternate livelihood options for their financial betterment. As in most traditional communities, the lives of fisher folk are governed by a set of socio-cultural values and norms which hinder their development. Factors like religious beliefs and rationalization, cultural norms, behavioral norms, myths, perceptions and moral values exert a strong influence on the fisher folk's social as well as economic lives. The political and social involvement of women, particularly in decision-making and leadership roles, has been very limited or even negligible. They should be brought out from these social clutches and be made to involve in income earning activities to improve their living standards.

Areas of Livelihood

In general, rural women's work patterns are characterized by involvement in unchanged type of work and it is flexible. Change and flexibility are characterized by women taking on new roles in agricultural production, fisheries production, off-farm production and community production to ensure the family's access to food and household resources. Even though our country is enriched with natural resources the main hindrance for utilizing

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the resources are lack of proper planning, technical know
how, financial support, interest of the end users, marketing
opportunities and sustainability. If the available resources
within their vicinity namely farm ponds, breakwater areas,
productive lands, and raw materials are put into use
for better production it may create a wide range of
employment opportunities.

Fishery based location specific livelihood options
for fisherwomen in major maritime states of India is elicited
in the table below. These are some of the possible areas in
which women could be employed, and gain additional
employment and better income.

**Tamil Nadu**
In Gulf of Manner region, women could be very well employed in sea weed
collection, drying, sea weed culture, value
added seaweed products such as alginate,
sesame leaf pickle, wafers, jams, seaweed
manure preparation, ornamental shell
collection, making ornamental artifacts with
sea shell, raising of artificial coral reefs,
and Jatropha cultivation. In Palk Bay region
women have options to take up crab
fattening, pearl culture specifically
implantation of nuclear beads, sea
cucumber culture, ornamental fish culture,
shrimp farming, feed preparation, fish
culture, shrimp processing and oil extraction
(Species which are not banned), lobster
fattening, palmarin craft, salt pans,
mangrove raising, coir making.

**Kerala**
Edible oyster culture, ornamental fish culture,
mussel culture, fish culture, breeding and seed
production of pearl spot, poly culture of sea
community and tilapia, shrimp seed collection, clam
collection, shrimp hatcheries, shrimp feed
preparation, value addition of fish, clam,
mussels, prawn peeling, fish drying,
ornamental/aquarium fish rearing, aquarium
plants propagation, value addition from
eichornia weed, house boats and floating
restaurants fodder cultivation, vegetable
cultivation in bunds of the farms, running fish
cold storage shops, coir making.

**Karnataka**
Shrimp farming, mussel culture, fish drying,
vending, marketing, oyster and clam
collection, prawn peeling and other fish
processing industries, gutting and de-
heading of fishes for surimi plants, net
mending/making, raw material processing
for fish meal plants, shell collection and
handicraft making, shark fin, and oil
extraction (Species which are not banned),
fish curry masala making, running petty
shops and restaurants, preparation of aqua
feeds, jatropha cultivation for bio diesel.

**Andhra Pradesh**
Prawn culture, pearl culture specifically
implantation of nuclear beads, fish seed
collection, shrimp peeling and other fish
processing plants, preparation of value
addition, prawn feed preparation, fish
selling and drying, auctioning, vending,
smoking of fish, palmarin fruit jelly
preparation, oil extraction from oil sardines,
fish stall in beach areas with ready to eat
fish preparations, labourers in salt pans,
basket making, petty shops in harbour,
palmarin craft.

**Orissa**
Crab breeding, nursery rearing, poly culture,
breeding of cat fish, fresh water prawn
culture in backyards, ornamental fish
breeding and rearing; aquaculture of
shrimp, crab collection, fattening and
culture, paddy cum fish integrated farming,
fresh water pearl culture, culture of spirulina
and azolla, duck weed collection to use
them as bio fertilizer. *Spirulina* preparations
namely papad, biscuits, noodles and
capsules, golden grass trading and
cultivation, feed preparation for fresh water
fish, shell collection, shell meat extraction,
shrimp peeling, dry fish processing, basket
weaving, kitchen garden and backyard
vegetable cultivation, as laborers in cashew
plantation.

**West Bengal**
Fish drying, marketing, fish sorting, fish
farming, collection of shrimp seed,
cultivation of edible algae for fish feed,
poly culture, crab farming, oyster culture,
 pisciculture, litchi fattening, feed making
units, shrimp culture, value added fish
products, pond fish culture integrated with
livestock rearing and horticultural crops on
the banks of the ponds, tourist attraction
places like Sunderbans where there is scope
for ecotourism women can run restaurants,
petty shops, handicraft shops, location
guides boat rides for tourists.

**Maharashtra**
Fishing of Kolim (mysid shrimp) can be
done by women, processing of kolim, fish
drying, marketing, by catch drying, value
added products preparation, crab seed
production, crab poly culture, ornamental
fish culture, feed for carp, running fish
booths, vending of dressed fish/fillets fish,
dry fish preparation and marketing,
processing of ready to cook fish products
pickling, shell fish processing, running of
seafood kitchen, production of fish feeds,
production of fish silage/manure, chitin and
chitosan manufacture, shark fin and shark
fin rays processing (Species which are not banned).

Gujarat
Aquaculture of shrimp, lobster fattening, sea weed collection and culture, agar preparation and by products from seaweeds such as seaweed pickle, wafers, papads, jams, fish marketing, fish drying and fish processing, drying by catch for fish meal plant, prawn peeling, squid processing, Jatropha cultivation and value addition.

In general, the major areas other than fisheries in which women could be employed includes the following activities of enterprises.
- Agriculture, raising of crops, growing of ornamental plants, vegetable cultivation at farm steads, kitchen gardening, growing bund crops, ornamental plant nurseries, aromatic and medicinal plants growing, flower cultivation.
- Processing industries: Processing of cereals and pulses to make ready to cook or eat items
- Agro-based industries: Dairying, poultry, piggery, bee-keeping, sheep and goat rearing, sericulture, arboriculture.
- Fruits and vegetable preservation and utilization: Bottling and canning of fruits
- Handlooms weaving, hosiery and knitting
- Basket and rope making, coil making, cane and wicker work
- Pottery, clay toys, making of bricks and tiles, working in salt pans, making kitchenwares and utensils
- Fabric making, tailoring and ready-made garment making, thread manufacturing, doll making.
- Sports goods, stationary goods, paper making and book binding.
- Aerated water and soft drink.
- Others: Running petty shops, food stalls, and restaurants.

The areas with employment potential should be explored by conducting field-oriented studies in the fishing in villages and a documentary plan, should be arrived at with the support of government, research institutes and other development organisations to be implemented in the village level. Besides for enhancing successful adoption of alternate livelihood options the marketing potential for the output of these programmes should also be ascertained for ensuring successful adoption of the livelihood options.

Groups Approach for Sustainable Livelihood
Participation of women in the development process through Self-Help Group approach brings about desired changes in the quality of individual life and also social cohesion in the society. Self-Help Group (SHG) helps to improve the morale of the individual and boost up their confidence and bring to the fore the hidden talents and skills of the individuals. Group efforts put forth tangible results. Community participation is a crucial factor for the expected outcome of the programmes. Self-Help Groups also contribute towards pooling of assets and achieving the specified goals.

The SGHS played a major role in the lives of the people and it is enhancing the standards of the people. Since it is functioning in the village itself women find it easy to participate effectively. It brings about the desired change in the quality of the individual and it is improving the women to come out from the social stigma. They break the values, norms and taboos to certain extent. It is witnessing cohesion in the society. Women have an opportunity to air their views. The formation of SHG being sub-contracted to a number of Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in their area of comparative advantage. In order to improve the incomes of fishing families, it was felt that income generating activities with financial support by the government, or foreign donor agencies was necessary. Further, projects should not be confined only to fishing-related activities, but also to other small scale non-fishery activities such as, coir making, ready-made garments, and mat making using the local raw materials. In order to strengthen the skills, both in management and technology, necessary training programmes should be conducted.

Process of Providing Sustainable Livelihood

Women who have their own source of income-generating livelihood spend four hours or less everyday on their activities; most men claim to work more than eight hours or five to eight hours for four to six days in a week. The gender-disaggregated seasonal activities calendar of the community constructed in a workshop session shows that the women of Rizal practically have no rest the whole year round, doing all the household chores or doing various production activities as well.

One can never think that fishing can be the only source of living in a coastal community. It is quite obvious that people in coastal areas could be employed in other sectors too. Until recently government programmes for women in the rural sector are more family development oriented geared mainly towards enhancing the domestic roles of women as wives and mothers (Jomo et al., 1985). The trend of promoting income generating through alternate livelihood was of recent origin which has made the policy makers realize the significant contribution of women towards the economic circle of the household and thus the country. Women involved in fisheries lack agricultural land for cultivation and also they will have limited space for rearing dairy or poultry. Even though some are involved in poultry rearing it is of subsistence level which meets their domestic requirement. If any small scale industries are developed it should be within their reach because they
cannot go to far off places for work because they have to play a domestic role. Their need should be assessed. It should be built on the preferences, priorities and vast knowledge of local people and their communities. Technologies/skill-oriented options would lead for self-sustainability.

The avenues for employment are the basis for income generation. The major areas in which women are employed or can be employed are aquaculture, mariculture, agriculture, animal husbandry, handy craft making, tailoring, and in processing industries. The four main supporters in this employment generation process are research organizations, financial institutions, marketing facilities and societal support.

(i) Financial Institutions

Capital is the major requirement for any enterprise. In case of the fisher households, most of them are living in subsistence only and hence they require the capital for attempting any venture of alternate livelihood options. The required amount for capital formation needs to be provided to the women so as to begin an enterprise. Capital investment is the major problem faced by the rural women and hence banks should come forward to support them with finance at a lower rate of interest and subsidy should be provided. Small scale units need to be registered and groups should be formed. Once the technology is adopted by the women the product made out of the technology should be linked with the market and made sustainable. The concept of SHG’s can be encouraged to finance the fisher women for taking up such alternate livelihood options.

(ii) Marketing Facilities

The success of any enterprise lies in its continuous and sustainable marketing. The market channel starts from the producer and ends in the consumer. It is the critical link between the producer and the end user. In any field the production depends upon its market. The persons involved in marketing should have market intelligence and better communication skill to persuade the consumer and sell the products. Women should be provided with market information on the various products produced by them. Suitable link with the retail outlets should be arranged so that there is a continuous demand for their products.

(iii) Societal Support

As explained already, the society plays a vital role in the empowerment of fisher women by encouraging them and lends support in running any enterprise selected under alternate livelihood options. In most of the traditional communities, the lives of fisher folk are governed by a set of socio-cultural values and norms. Societal support is the basis for rural women’s progress. Such a support will motivate the women to come out of their shells and take up suitable livelihood options and thus make them empowered both economically and socially. Congenial social environment upgrades the women empowerment. Factors like religious beliefs and rationalization, cultural norms, behavioral norms, myths, perceptions and moral values exert a strong influence on the fisher folk’s social as well as economic lives. The political and social involvement of women, particularly in decision-making and leadership roles, has to be enhanced.

Strategies for Promoting Alternate Livelihood Options

Even though there are ample scopes for the fisherwomen to enhance their income through supplementary activities, both at government level and at policy making level some strategies to be formulated which are listed below.

1. Women groups to be organized to set up small scale production enterprises with the credit support of financial institutions. These can either be a conventional business, done by the individual at household level like fish processing, preparation of value added products or new ventures related to export market. The preparation should use locally available raw materials, with low cost machines and simple technology. The products should be marketed through intermediaries, local shops, or cooperatives.

2. In each coastal district of the maritime states with the support of the local panchayat, women oriented developmental/income generating programmes with grants and subsidies required to be implemented. Women link workers have to be identified to act as local coordinators between the fisherwomen and other developmental departments.

3. Women cooperatives should be established at district level such as fish processing cooperatives, credit and marketing societies and producers’ association and the produce developed by the fisherwomen group exclusively should be marketed.

4. Upgrading the educational background and skill of women by providing them rural learning institutions such as primary schooling, adult literacy classes, and vocational training in fisheries and agriculture innovations and it should be backed up with social/ physical environment to adopt the technologies.

5. Existing SHGs have to be strengthened and the women should have a common forum to voice their candid views.

6. Women working as wage labourers should be brought under the organised sector and to be protected under the Labour law. They should be ensured with minimum wage legislation and social security measures.

Agricultural Situation in India
Alternate livelihood options Model

**Institutional/Government support**
- Technological support
- Training/Demonstration
- Skill development
- Group formation
- Implementation of programmes
- Input availability
- Utilisation of natural resources

**Financial/credit support**
- Providing loans/credit
- Subsidies
- Grants
- Insurance
- Low level of interest
- Enhance pay back period

**Avenues**
- Agriculture
- Dairy
- Fisheries
- Handicrafts
- Rural cottage industries
- Processing industries

**Marketing support**
- Development of market chains
- Creation of market demand
- Marketing facilities
- Price fixation
- Support price
- Transportation

**Social support**
- Family support
- Societal support
- Social participation
- Social network
- Congenial environment

**Advantages**
- Enhanced income
- Improved standard of living
- Economic empowerment
- Social recognition
- Effective time utilization

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7. Women should be made aware about their legal rights and about the schemes and developmental measures offered by both government and non-government agencies.

8. Ownership of assets should be distributed emphasizing priority to gender because for any loan purpose the financial organisations require collateral security. So if the women have assets, by mortgaging their assets they can get loan from the banks and other money lending institutions to start or to scale up small enterprises.

9. Providing physical capital assets such as drying yards, peeling sheds and cold storage facilities in the coastal villages are important to pursue diversified livelihood strategy and also to enhance the income of the fisherwomen by reducing post harvest losses.

10. Care should be taken to safe guard the women dominated areas such as fish drying, marketing, prawn peeling and processing not be eroded away by technological innovations.

11. Women should be enlightened about the prevailing social norms, cultural taboos and conservative thinking which hinders their opportunities and access to economic resources and activities and they should be made known about the significance of education, income generation, and other betterment avocations for their livelihood security.

12. Social infrastructure such as roads and transport facilities to the markets should be developed to reduce the drudgery of women and also health management facilities such as health clinics, and sanitation installations to afford a hygienic and healthy milieu. Basic amenities such as water and electricity should be provided to reduce their work load because water and fuel collection consumes a major share of their time. Since women are subjected to take care of their children it is necessary to provide day care/play school in the villages where women can leave their children while they are coming out for working.

Conclusion

Benefits the fisherwomen community gains through the employment are both direct and indirect. Women could perform most of the on farm and off farm activities with modest training and societal support. To a certain extent their role should be supported by government institutions, NGOs and other developmental organizations by way of implementing women centric programmes. Earnings made by women are the factual assets of the family because they spend judiciously for the welfare of the family and hence women should have core access to income generation. Sustainable monetary income could be fuelled only by sound technologies and other interventions. Women should be made to have right of entry to promising areas of development. Since women have to take care of home/domestic work the time for supplementary avocation should be planned in such a way that it should not hamper their normal chore of activities. By way of providing alternate employment the standard of living of the fisherwomen family will be upgraded due to additional income of the family and also leisure time could be spent effectively. Women gains social recognition and this would offer opportunities to overcome the societal hindrances. The ultimate aim of alternate livelihood avocations is to reduce poverty among coastal families by empowering the productive capacity of fisherwomen and to elevate the fisherwomen community from the poor domain.

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