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CMFRI empowers women in coastal Kerala as entrepreneurs



Kochi: A national marine research institute is helping women in coastal Kerala turn their skills into successful businesses, creating new sources of income through fish farming, seafood processing and other fisheries-based enterprises. The ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) has helped establish 84 micro-enterprises across eight districts in Kerala under its Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Hub initiative. The project has enabled women from coastal communities, many of them from Scheduled Caste families, to move towards economic independence. The initiative, funded by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), has directly benefited 469 people, including 220 women and six transgender persons. Around 2,500 others are expected to benefit indirectly. An impact assessment found that household incomes among the beneficiaries had increased by 30–35 per cent, CMFRI's Principal Scientist, Dr Vipinkumar V.P., who led the project. The CMFRI conducted 141 training programmes to equip beneficiaries with the technical knowledge and business skills needed to establish and manage their enterprises.

The businesses cover a wide range of activities, from cage fish farming, pearl spot seed production and ornamental fish culture to mussel, oyster, and clam cultivation. Others have taken up integrated fish farming, seafood value addition, fish vending, and dry fish production. The initiative has also helped beneficiaries develop specialised skills in cage fabrication, aquarium technology, integrated farming, and the distribution of fish seed and broodstock. Some have established themselves as skilled professionals, opening up opportunities beyond conventional livelihood activities. The CMFRI provided technology transfer, practical training and entrepreneurial guidance. It also facilitated market linkages through its Agricultural Technology Information Centre and Krishi Vigyan Kendra. “The initiative helped women move beyond traditional livelihood roles to become producers, skilled service providers and business owners in the fisheries value chain,” Dr Vipinkumar said. CMFRI Director Dr Grinson George said the project demonstrated how scientific knowledge could create tangible economic opportunities for coastal communities. He described the STI Hub as a model that could be replicated to empower women and promote inclusive growth in the fisheries sector.

The CMFRI will mark Women Farmers’ Day on Thursday at the farm of Dr Akhilamol in Kodungallur. A national award-winning entrepreneur and beneficiary of the initiative, she will host an event highlighting the achievements of women who have built livelihoods through fisheries-based enterprises.