

**WOMEN IN THE SEAFOOD
PROCESSING SECTOR IN THE POST
GLOBALIZATION SCENARIO- AN
ANALYSIS**

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Introduction

- Indian seafood industry almost exclusively export oriented from its inception in the early 1950s
- Risen from very rudimentary freezing and packing to the present level with products like IQF, breaded and battered products and imitation or analogue products
- Exported 0.61 million mt in 2006-07 to over 100 countries
- With trade liberalization as part of globalization since the early 1990s, changes are taking place in way countries produce with exploitation of those factors of production in which they have comparative advantage

- Food safety requirements of importing countries becoming more stringent
- **Industry forced to upgrade its infrastructure to meet these standards**
- Infrastructure includes 399 processing plants, 215 of them EU approved
- **Women**
 - Dominate the seafood processing sector – world
 - Manual dexterity required primary reason
 - Largely confined to lower rungs of the production process
 - Work done technically comes under the ‘unskilled’ or ‘semiskilled’ category
 - Estimated 0.15 million women in India

The data

- Part of a research project of Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) studying the various parameters affecting the sustainability of the seafood industry
- Cross sectional data of 128 randomly selected women working in 5 EU approved processing factories in Veraval, Gujarat state



- Average capacity - 43.05 mt per day
- EU approved units - meet the most stringent quality standards, including captive pre-processing
- Assumption - women workforce would be better off than in other non-EU units vis-à-vis working environment



Data collection

- Personal interviews and collection of information based on a questionnaire
- Data on units collected from management
- Macro details collected from secondary sources like published data from the Marine Products Export Development Authority



Findings

Seafood processing sector - Gujarat

- Industry spread along the maritime states of India
- Gujarat's share is \$ 281 million out of a total export of \$ 1853 million during 2006-07
- 22 of the total 64 processing units in Gujarat EU approved

2006-07	Quantity (mt)	Value (Rs. Crores)
India	612641	8364
Gujarat	188166	1265
% share of Gujarat to total	30.71	15.12

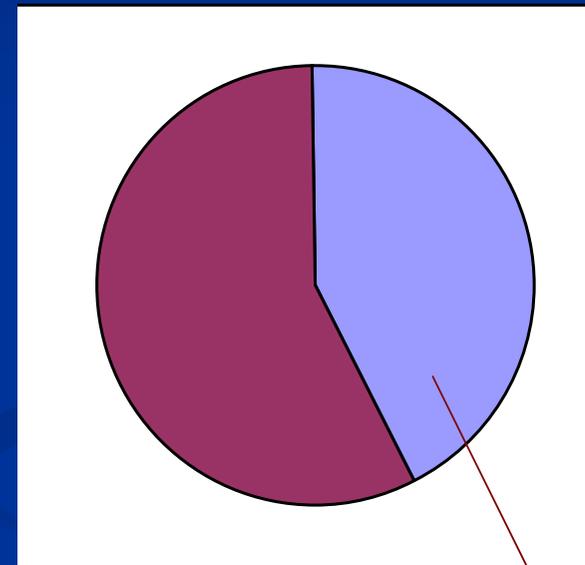
Distribution of work force by gender

S.No	Category	Average number of men workers		Average number of women workers	
		Regular	Contract	Regular	Contract
1	Administrative	14	1	1	0
2	Quality Control	5	0	2	0
3	Plant level	10	5	0	0
4	Floor level	13	88	21	153
5	Others	8	8	5	0

Women dominant at the floor level

Socio- personal characteristics

- Generally belong to the coastal areas from poor socio-economic backgrounds
- Average per capita monthly income of families Rs. 1483 (approx. US \$ 33)
- Sustenance of family main reason for taking up this employment



Women's share in family income 42.5%

- Various studies in other labour intensive export oriented sectors - there is distinct preference for young, unmarried women at the floor level
- Here, average age of women workers 25 (63.28% of respondents below 25)
- Education ranged from illiterate to the tenth standard (64.8% had attended school upto some level, many of them drop outs)
- 64.1% women in processing units and 57.14% in pre-processing units were single
- Apart from social reasons like not returning to work after marriage, unwillingness of the employer to accommodate them major reason

- Employers need not provide maternity benefits
- Average work experience 2.6 and 3.8 years respectively for processing and pre-processing workers (substantiating the fact that marriage acted as a deterrent for continuation of the employment)
- Working hours - 9.00 am to 6.00 pm
- However, work dependent on the raw material arrival, working hours tend to be flexible
- Regular or permanent employees had fixed working hours and overtime benefits for work beyond this period

Casualization in the sector

- Dependence on large numbers of temporary women labour one way to reduce cost of production and increase export-competitiveness
- Increasing casualization of workforce in export oriented units as a result of globalization of trade and increased global competition reported in sectors like garments and textiles, manufacturing, especially in developing countries
- These women generally low-paid and compliant work force that aids in these sectors becoming highly competitive



- Supply of this workforce highly elastic, can be replaced continuously.
- **Our study reveals a high degree of casualization in the processing industry**



- 88.39% of women workforce in contract or temporary category
- **Only 7.59% of the women interviewed fell in regular or permanent category, with an average experience of 8 years**
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- Experience gained not contributed to career advancement and they continue to do the same work they have been doing all these years

- Among the migrants, 90% were contract or temporary workers
- **Entire local workforce also contract or temporary**
- Though dependence on contract workforce high, the responsibility of industry towards them is only partial
- **Main responsibility rests with contractor or person who recruits them**
- Issue here- social security benefits



- Responsibility to provide social security benefits like the Provident Fund and ESI mandatory on the part of the employer (i.e., the industry) only for regular employees
- For contract labour, industry has no such responsibility and our study observed that the contract workforce not enjoying any social security benefits
- Major effect of casualization in the sector, besides the absence of job security, which is still elusive and there is no assurance that the work will remain the next season.

The migrant workforce

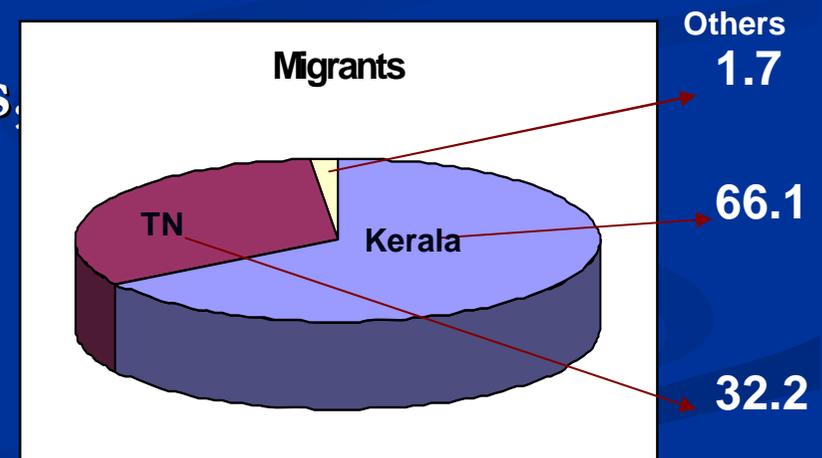
- Labour migration displacement of a person from his/her place of birth or original area of residence for the purpose of employment



- **Migrant women labour integral part of the seafood processing sector**

- 46.1% of respondent migrants, largely women

- **Local to migrants' ratio was 1:3 in processing units**



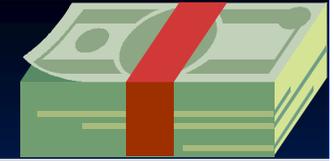
- Migration a serious issue, especially in the unorganized labour sector, as the women employed in these sectors can be subject to various forms and levels of exploitation
- The exploited status of migrant workers in seafood industry has been an area of study in many countries, especially Asian countries
- The migrant workers in India protected under the **'Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act in 1979'** ensuring the workers' minimum wages, equality, health care, proper accommodation, protective clothing, displacement allowance at the time of recruitment, journey allowance and prevents gender discrimination

- A court verdict in 1998, specifically for women in the seafood processing sector, also ensures benefits
 - The Minimum Wages Act, 1948
 - Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970
 - The Factories Act, 1948
 - The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948
 - The Employees Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provision Act, 1996
 - The Maternity Benefits Act, 1961
 - Industrial Employment (Standing Order) Act, 1946 and all other Labour Welfare Legislation

- Recruitment usually done by contractors or agents who have a link with the processing units.

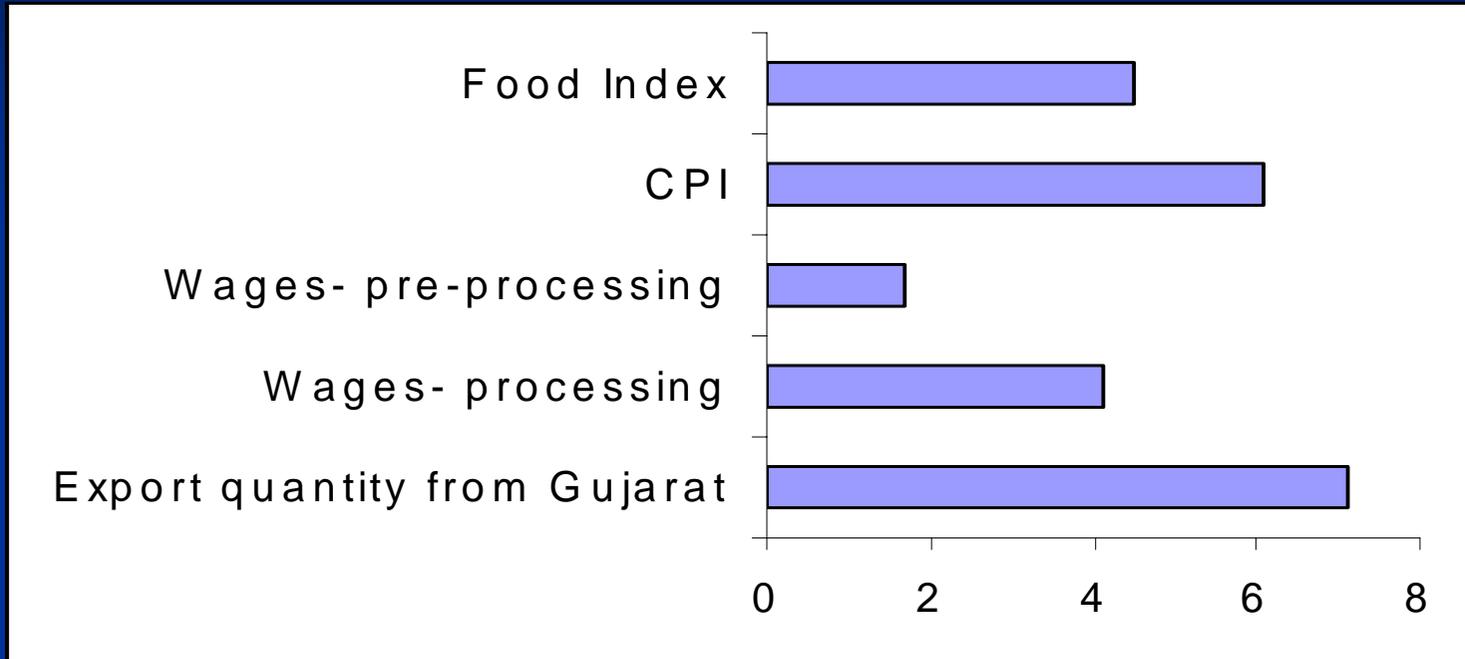
- According to the Act all contractors must have valid licenses and must ensure that the women receive the benefits assured under the Act
- Recruit women after wage negotiations and ultimate responsibility of the worker rests with the contractor and not with the industry
- Wage also generally routed through the contractor
- The present study observed that the women received allowances during journey and for displacement
- No other social security benefits, except for the mandatory health check-up at the beginning of the season

Wages



- Average monthly wage in processing units is Rs. 2594 (approx. US \$ 57), and in pre-processing units is Rs. 2525 (approx. US\$ 56)
- Wages just about conform to Minimum Wages prescribed for the fisheries and seafood industry in Gujarat under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948
- Apparently no gender based wage differential as men and women are not engaged in comparable jobs
- Women - processing activities; men - low end jobs include loading and unloading, packing, transportation etc. which are 'heavy jobs'

- At macro level



- Apparently women in processing sector seem to have benefited, but since duration of employment is low the actual trickle down of benefits has not taken place

Perceptions towards work & related factors

- Importing country requirements forced the sector to make improvements in the infrastructure, hence having positive affected vis-à-vis work environment



- Health check up- mandatory for EU approved units to be arranged by the employers as per quality assurance requirements and health card maintained by the employer

- Majority of the labour force have poor job satisfaction
- Continue to work because of family compulsions as their income is a major source of sustenance for the family
- Though income the women earn is significant contributor to family income, they have no say in deciding the family expenditure.
- It was either the father or husband who decided matters in the family

HRD

- Productivity of worker dependent on the HRD
- No gender oriented investment in HRD in the sector- only women in quality control departments undergo training where technological changes and demands are higher with increasing stress by importing countries on the quality assurance of the products
- No clear cut policy for ensuring skill development, with only the mandatory minimum workplace training in EU approved units on basic and operational hygiene and sanitation being provided

- 73% of women also felt that there was no scope for skill development and they would continue doing the jobs that they are doing without any change in the method of work, boredom and no incentives

- **Women continue to**
 - occupy lower rungs of the sector
 - involved in work that has fixed work postures, drudgery and low wages

- Practically no scope for improvement and rising up the ladder as their skill and training not sufficient enough to make that happen

Gender Implications



According to the United Nations (2004) the quality of employment and conditions of work includes regularity of employment, social protection, working time, intensity of work, possibility of career advancement or skill upgrading.

- Laws already in place to protect women from exploitation and ensure them fair wages and social security
- **Proactive implementation strategy needed**
- Employment per se has not led to any true empowerment or ensured gender equality
- **Women have weak bargaining power and cannot counter the forces where producers will try and depress wages**

- Things to do:

- Change the definition of their job into a 'skilled activity'

- During the initial years of the industry there was considerable wastage of meat, now the activity is very refined and the women are able to extract the maximum possible yield from the raw material

- With the job becoming a 'skilled', the women will become entitled to additional benefits, including an increase in wages

- Things to do:

- Regularize contractual labour

- With contractual labour being the norm rather than the exception, many benefits under the various Acts will not be available to the women as a matter of right
 - Steps to regularize their status of employment even if it is a contractual one would be needed to ensure that they are also entitled to all the benefits

- Things to do:

- A social audit by the Labour Officers also be made mandatory to see that the women get all the benefits that have been assured to them by Law of the land

- Simultaneously, a provision to impart legal literacy along with the social audit must be ensured so that the women themselves are aware of the rights they are entitled to



Thank you