



Individual to Collective Strength: Women's Capability Expansion in Kerala's Fisheries Economy

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WOMEN AND FISHERY OF KERALA-INDIA

- In India Fisheries sector both Marine and Inland sector provided employment to some 14.5 million people.
- Women representing about 32 percent of the people employed in the sector mainly in the post-harvest sector.
- Kerala's fisheries sector is vital for the state's economy employment and livelihoods for thousands.
- Among the 10.60 lakhs population in the state women constitute , women constitute 35 % of the population.
- Women have historically been involved in various aspects of the fisheries industry
- Their predominant role was in post harvest sector and it was 79 % of the total workforce in the post harvest sector.
- Fisherwomen face multiple **capability deprivations** – limited resources, insecure incomes, mobility restrictions, and lack of representation.



Do collective groups empower women in the fisheries sector?

1. Government Support and Scale of Intervention

- Schemes like Society for Assistance to Fisherwomen (SAF) , Theeramythri , Matsyafed , PMMY, SCSP, TSP.
- Focus on social and financial empowerment of fisherwomen through capacity-building, skill development, and entrepreneurial support.
- In 2023–24, through SAFs Kerala Govt spend ₹40.15 million, benefitted thousands of fisherwomen through training, entrepreneurship, and revolving fund support.

2. Gender Disparities and Women's Limited Role

- Limited role in production.
- Disadvantages in access to resources, production and decision making .
- Men dominating fish landing centres, harbours, and commercialized spaces.

3. Individual Constraints and Collective strength and empowerment

- Individually, fisherwomen face barriers like restricted mobility and financial limitations.
- Collective groups and solidarity strengthen women's capabilities, skills, and bring meaningful change and empowerment.

OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

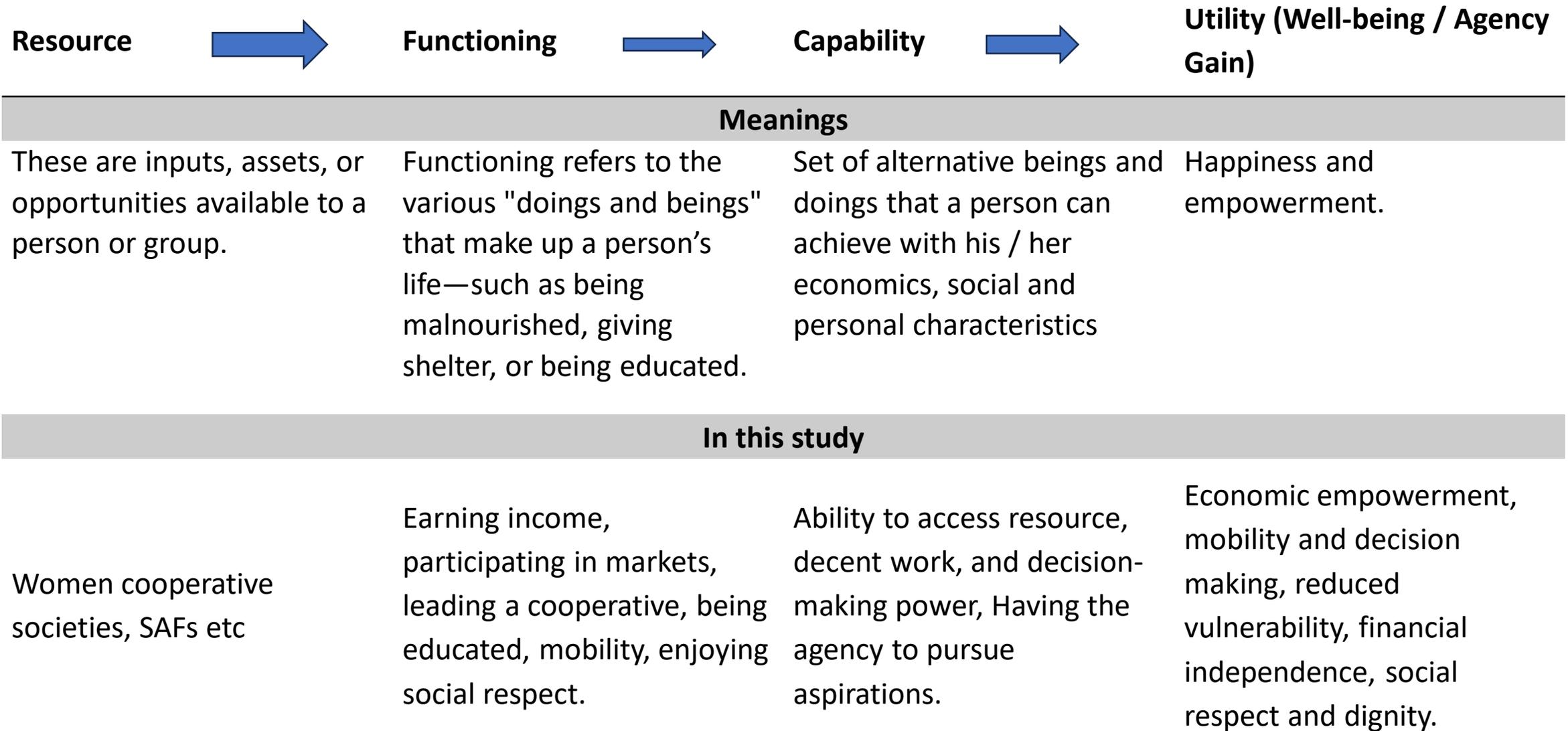
Objective

- How such SHG like **women- collective enterprises** women cooperatives, SAFs, and women federations contribute to expanding women's capabilities.
- To identify the **key challenges** faced by women's collective enterprises in fisheries sector of Kerala and,
- **Actionable recommendation.**

Data and methods

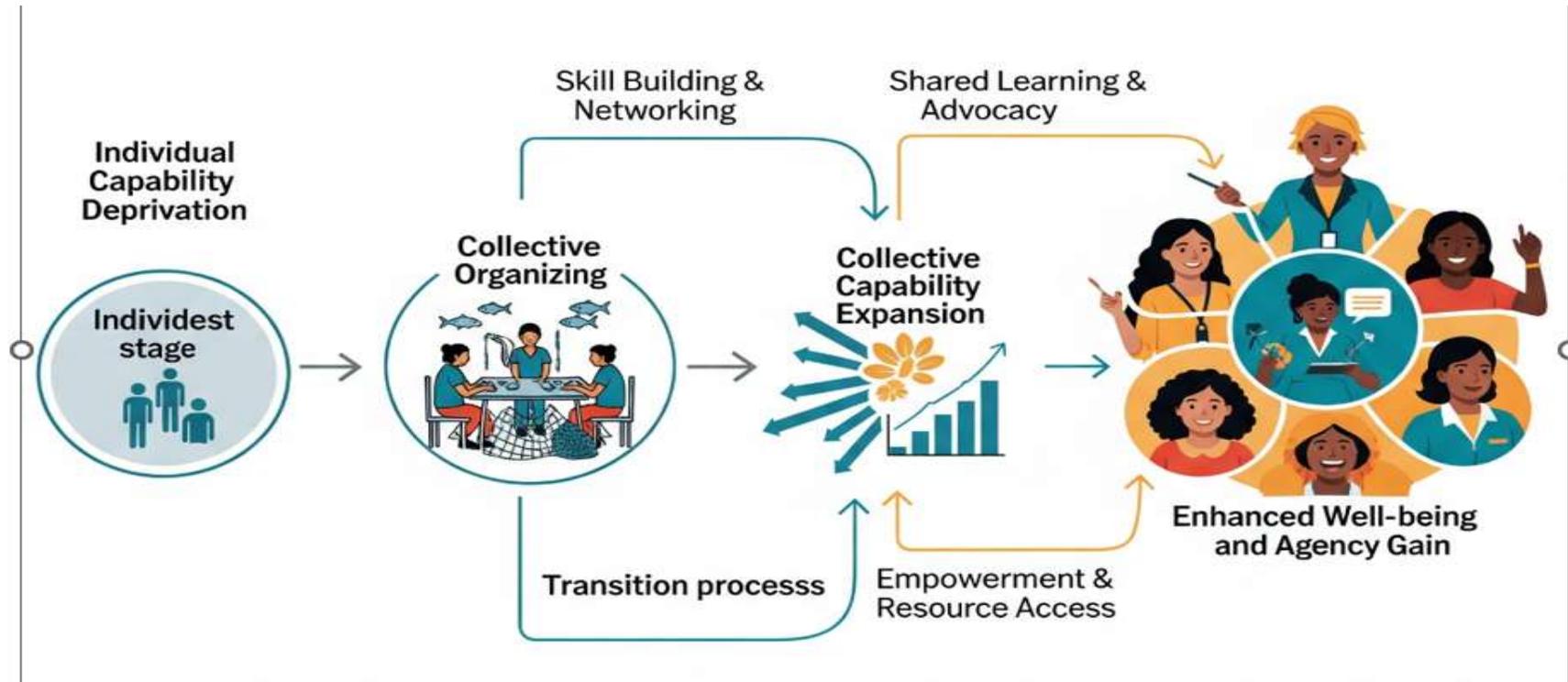
- **Both primary and secondary data**
- **Field-level data and case studies:** Documenting the experiences, practices, and outcomes of women-led initiatives.
- **Primary data:** The study covers 15 women's groups with a total population of 44 members. mean of member 3.
- Data were collected at the individual level.
- **Policy analysis :** Documenting the experiences, practices, and outcomes of women-led initiatives.

Sen's Capability Approach: Conceptual framework



Source: *Sen, 1989, 1999; Assaduzzaman, 2023; Menon, 2020*

Framework of study : Sen's capability approach



Individual Constraints → Collective Organizing → Access to Resources → Conversion Factors (social, institutional, personal) → Capability Expansion → Functionings (income, mobility, leadership, voice) → Enhanced Agency & Collective Capabilities → Women leading lives they value

Women's Collective Groups in Fisheries

1. Fresh Fish Booths

- Organized, **fixed selling point** (booth/stall) often supported by **SAF, Matsyafed.**
- **Fish stall**
- Provides women with secure and hygienic market spaces.
- Using online delivery system.

2. Dry Fish Units

- Both organised and unorganised are functioning
- Organized, **fixed selling point** (booth/stall) often supported by **SAF, Matsyafed.**
- Unorganized: no fixed units, often operate from home, use open and traditional drying methods, support of collective effort.
- They collectively took fish directly from landing centres.
- Using the local marketing opportunities.

3. Value Addition Units

- Preparation of **fish pickles, snacks, ready-to-cook products**
- Builds entrepreneurial skills and product diversification
- Expands market reach and consumer demand.



Illustration of SAF: A three-member unit operating a dry fish unit in Paravoor , Ernakulam , Kerala

Profile of Fisherwomen Prior to Joining Collective Groups

- **Mean age:** 52 years
- **Educational level:** Most had primary education and secondary education
- **Experience in the sector:** 15–25 years on average
- **Employment type:** 54% were homemakers, while 46% combined household responsibilities with individual self-employed activities such as fish drying and fish vending at a minimal scale.

Socio-economic and capability position before joining groups:

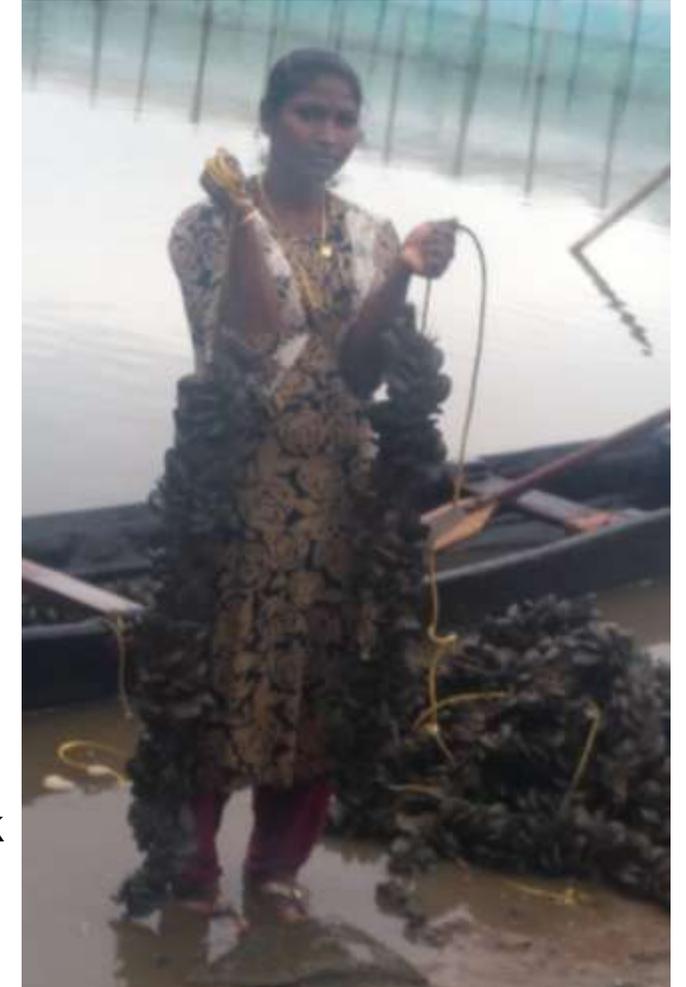
- *Minimal and unstable income*
- *Restricted mobility due to gender norms*
- *Decision-making power largely rested with husbands or elder male members of the household*
- *Most had no productive savings.*

Women Capability Expansion: Collective strength and Solidary

Capability expansion of women means **widening the real opportunities and choices available to women** so that they can live the kind of life they value.

- Increasing their **freedoms** (to do work, mobility, manage money)
- Enhancing their **skills and resources**
- **Income improvement and saving habits**
- **Decision-making capacity:** Their role in household and group decisions improved
- **Improved financial autonomy and Reduced financial autonomy**
- **Social respect and Dignity**
- **Removing barriers** like Socio –economics , patriarchal gender norms, lack of access to resource etc.

Capability expansion = expanding women's set of choices + agency → which leads to empowerment.



Capability expansion lead to Women Empowerment

“ Women’s empowerment – mobility, Control over resources, decision-making, social networks, and participation in political and economic activities.”

Expanding women’s capabilities leads to both Economic empowerment and Social empowerment.

- **Mobility as a capability** – the ability of a woman to move freely beyond her home and then from society.
- **Income growth** – women’s earnings increased through collective activities and reduced credit dependency .
- **Productive savings** – ability to save regularly, unlike before
- **Improved bargaining power** – stronger position in markets.
- **Decision-making power** – greater role in household and community decisions.
- **Social respect** – enhanced recognition from family and society.
- **Reduced credit dependency** – better financial stability and access to formal credit.
- **Entrepreneurial skills** – development of business and leadership capacities



*Illustration of SAF: Represents **collective livelihood activity** under fisheries economy initiatives -a fresh fish vending booth. Ernakulam , Kerala.*

Major challenges confronted by the collective groups

Inadequate Infrastructures facilities like storage facility and transpiration

Limited financial resources or capital

Marketing and Value chain constraints

Limited acceptance of technology

Economic issues

Limited access to raw materials

Climate change

Conclusion and suggestion

Conclusion

- Collective action strengthens capabilities and improve empowerment
- Strengthening their wellbeing as collective group
- Collective organizing enhance shared capabilities and lead to meaningful workplace changes.
- Similarities in the socio-economics background and individual aspiration helped in nurturing solidarity and personal bonding among them.
- Collective strength help to remove the individual barriers as they have earlier.

Suggestions

- Provide interest-free or low-interest loans for fish-based enterprises
- Hand on training in value addition, and marketing
- More women friendly fish market system especially fish auction and supply
- **Policy and institutional support: present** involvement is commendable and along with this Offer subsidies for equipment, storage, processing, and value-addition units managed by women.