



VOICES OF SILENCE: ABSENCE OF WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE OF CULTURE-BASED FISHERIES (CBF) IN SRI LANKA

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Culture-Based Fisheries (CBF)

Stocking, harvesting, and managing fish in reservoirs
Key livelihood strategy in rural Sri Lanka, especially dry zones



Sri Lankan Gender Context

- ✓ Women = 51.6% of population (DCS, 2024)
- ✓ ~30% of total labor force, but contributions in fisheries often underreported
- ✓ Significant informal & unpaid roles in fishing households



Gender & Governance Problems in Fisheries

✗ Male-dominated fisheries societies ✗ Women's participation often limited to inherited membership (widows) ✗ Cultural & social barriers restrict active involvement ✗ Governance & policy frameworks overlook women's roles



Need for Research

- ? How do socio-economic, cultural, and governance factors shape equity in CBF?
- ? What opportunities exist to enhance women's inclusion in fisheries governance?

Main Objective:

To assess how gendered differences influence fisheries governance and social equity outcomes in culture-based fisheries (CBF) societies in Sri Lanka.

Specific Objectives :

To examine gendered perceptions of benefit distribution, participation, decision-making, and income equity in CBF societies.

To identify socio-cultural and institutional barriers limiting women's participation in fisheries governance.

To analyze the relationship between gender composition in fisheries societies and perceived fairness, efficiency, and livelihood outcomes.

To suggest governance reforms that promote inclusive and gender-responsive CBF systems.

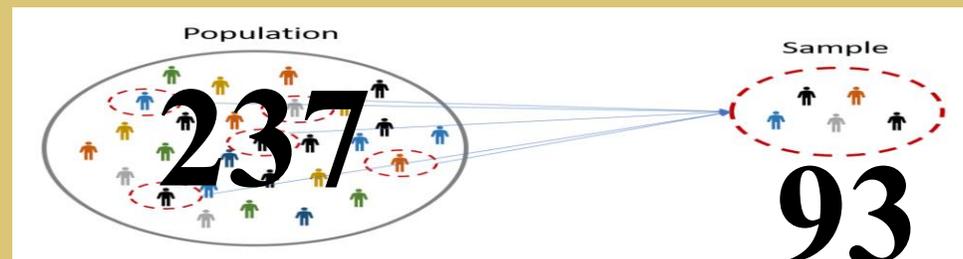
Research Sites: Four Reservoirs in Puttalam District, Sri Lanka

Total reservoirs in the research: **04 Reservoirs**

Reservoir types	District	Name of the Reservoir	Total number of fishing society members	Sample size	
				Male	Female
Medium (02)	Puttalam	Karawitagaraya	48	20	02
		Tabbowa	135	48	05
Minor (02)		Kottukachchiya	30	09	01
		Pahariya	24	07	01
TOTAL			237	93	



The total sample size is 93, representing **40%** of the total study population.



Methodology

Data Collection Tool: Structured, pre-tested questionnaire (face-to-face interviews).

Sampling Method: Randomized selection within fisheries societies.

Key Variables:

- Socio-economic profile (age, education, household size, marital status, etc.)
- Perceptions of equity in benefit-sharing, participation, decision-making, and income.

Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation by gender.



Socio-demographic Characteristics of Fishers and their Households

Gender			Age			Household size			Education			Civil status		
<u>Male</u>	84	90%	20-29 (Young)	08	9%	Small Household (1-2)	14	15%	No formal education (0)	01	1%	<u>Married</u>	82	88%
			30-39 (Early Middle - Aged)	25	27%				Primary education (1-5)	10	10%			
Female	09	10%	<u>40-49 (Middle Aged)</u>	32	34%	<u>Medium Household (3-5)</u>	72	77%	<u>Secondary education (6-10)</u>	46	50%	Widowed	07	8%
			50-59 (Older Middle-Aged)	17	18%				Tertiary education (11-13)	36	39%	Divorced	03	3%
			60 and above (Older)	11	12%	Large Household (6+)	07	8%						

Gender imbalance: Fishing is almost exclusively male-dominated (90%).

Age concentration: Core workforce is middle-aged (40–49); low youth participation may threaten future sustainability.

Household size: Medium households dominate, which may balance labor and dependents.

Education: Despite being a traditional occupation, fishers are fairly educated; half have secondary education, and a significant portion (39%) have tertiary education.

Civil status: Predominantly married, suggesting strong household support networks.

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Fishers and their Households by Gender

Age	Female	Male	Household size	Female	Male	Education	Female	Male	Civil status	Female	Male
20-29 (Young)	0	8(9%)	Small Household (1-2)	4(45%)	10(12%)	No formal education (0)	0	1(1%)	Married	0	82(98%)
30-39 (Early Middle - Aged)	1(11%)	24(29%)				Primary education (1-5)	2(22%)	8(10%)	Unmarried	0	1(1%)
40-49 (Middle Aged)	2(22%)	30(36%)	Medium Household (3-5)	4(45%)	68(81%)	Secondary education (6-10)	5(56%)	41(49%)	Widowed	7(78%)	0
50-59 (Older Middle-Aged)	1(11%)	16(19%)				Tertiary education (11-13)	2(22%)	34(40%)	Divorced	2(22%)	1(1%)
60 and above (Older)	5(56%)	6(7%)	Large Household (6+)	1(10%)	6(7%)						

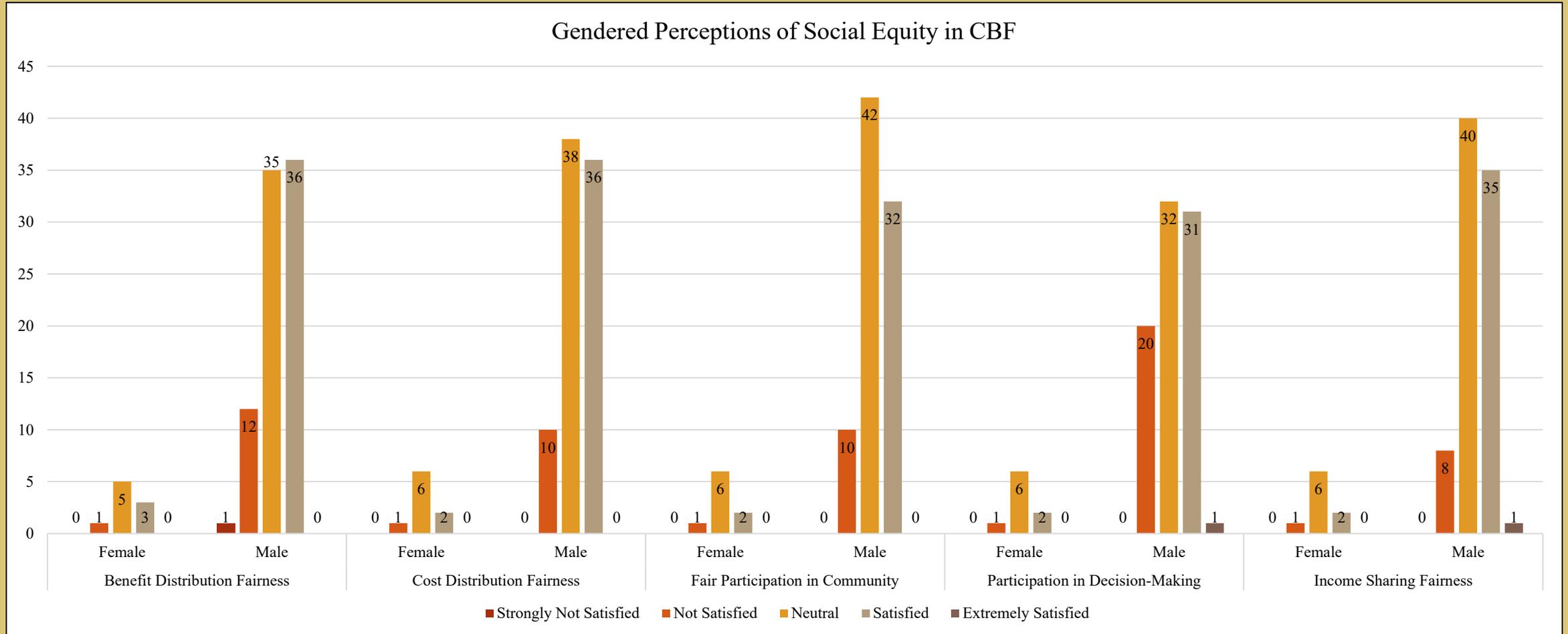
Women in fisheries societies are older and widowed, while men dominate the younger & married categories, showing structural exclusion of women from active governance.

Smaller household sizes for women suggest a weaker labor and resource base, limiting their influence.

Educational gap: **Women are concentrated in primary/secondary**, men dominate tertiary—affecting leadership opportunities.

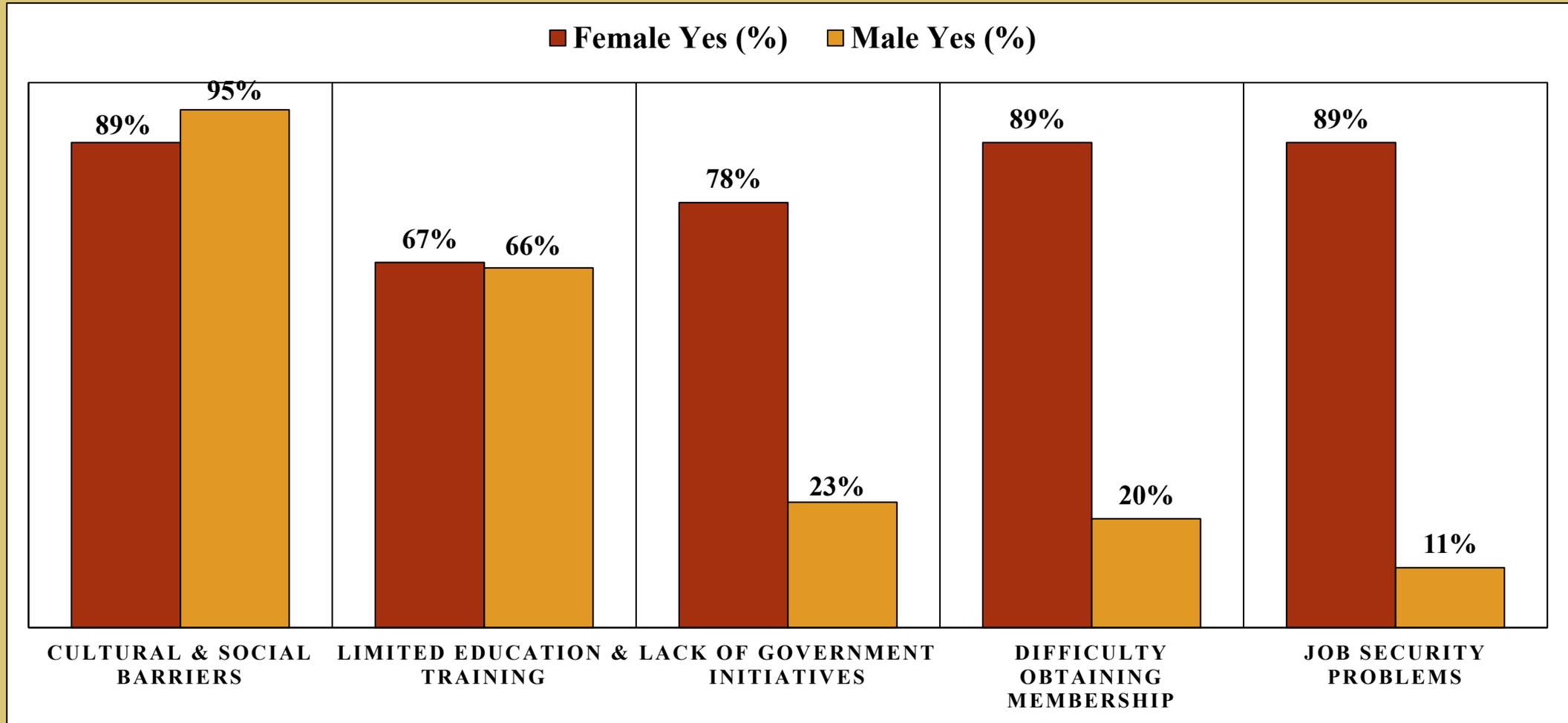
Women's membership is often inherited, not earned, reinforcing gender inequity in governance structures.

Gendered Perceptions of Equity and Participation in CBF



- ✓ Women in CBF societies largely remain neutral or dissatisfied regarding fairness in benefits, costs, participation, decision-making, and income-sharing.
- ✓ 66% of women report limited ability to participate in decision-making, compared to mostly satisfied men.
- ✓ Male–female disparities indicate that formal membership does not guarantee meaningful participation for women.
- ✓ Communities with higher gender balance show stronger perceptions of equity and efficiency.
- ✓ Results underscore the urgent need for inclusive, gender-responsive governance to maximize social equity and livelihood outcomes.

Barriers for Women in CBF



- ✓ Major barriers women faced can be viewed in social, institutional, and economic aspects of CBF.
- ✓ 88–89% of women report cultural, membership, and job insecurity challenges.
- ✓ Lack of government support and education/training opportunities disproportionately affects women.
- ✓ These barriers limit meaningful participation in decision-making and governance.
- ✓ Urgent need for gender-responsive policies to improve equity and livelihoods.

Conclusion

Gender and Governance

- Women's underrepresentation in CBF governance limits their participation in decision-making and equitable benefit sharing. Communities with higher female membership report more fairness and efficiency.

Opportunities and Constraints

- Opportunities: Gender-inclusive policies, participatory governance, and capacity-building for women and men.
- Constraints: Structural exclusion of women, low female membership, and inequitable benefit distribution.

Implications for Sustainability

- Inclusive governance and active engagement of women can enhance social equity, improve livelihood outcomes, and strengthen the overall effectiveness of CBF systems.

Recommendations

✓ Policy & Governance

- Introduce gender-responsive policies and formal pathways for women's active participation in fisheries societies.

✓ Capacity Building

- Train and empower women and men for inclusive decision-making and sustainable fishery practices.

✓ Community Engagement

- Implement participatory governance models and stakeholder advisory groups to ensure transparency and equitable benefit distribution.

✓ Future Research Directions

- Examine long-term effects of women's inclusion on equity and livelihoods to guide inclusive policy development.

References

Department of Census and Statistics. (2024). Sri Lanka labour force survey: Annual report 2024. Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.

Additional data sources from fieldwork in culture-based fisheries (CBF) reservoirs in Sri Lanka.

Acknowledgements

Prof. M.G. Kularathna – MPhil Supervisor

Dr. Nireeka Weerathunga – Guidance on abstract preparation

GAP9 Organizing Committee

Mrs. Chesika Kanchana

Mrs. Gayani Paranamana

Fisheries communities engaged in culture-based fisheries (CBF) in Sri Lanka

Grateful thanks to all who supported and contributed to this research.





Thank You!