

Gender Dynamics in the Dried Fish Value Chains: Scanning the Policyscape

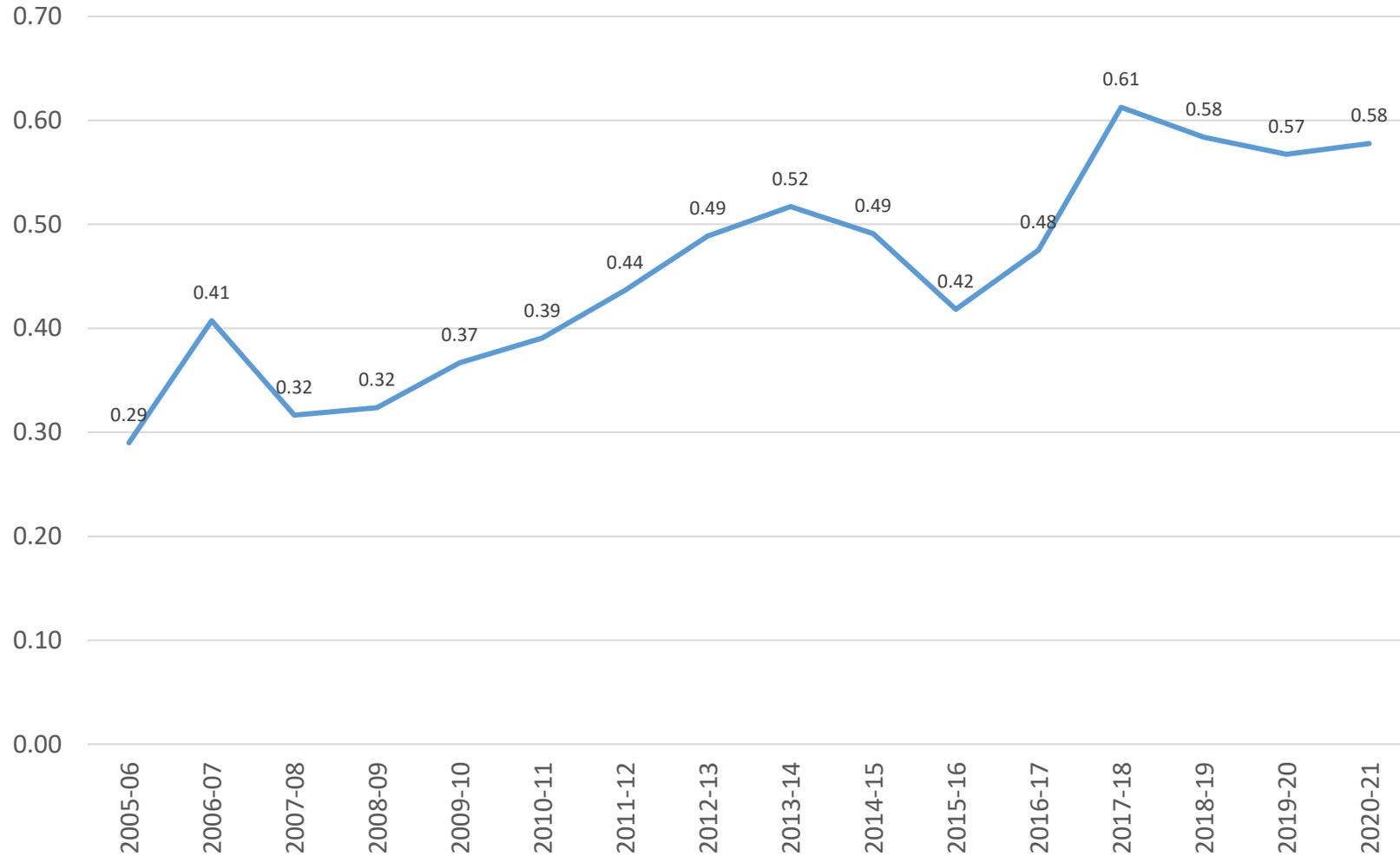
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Prologue

- Gujarat is a leading maritime state on the west coast of India – the second largest producer of marine fish (73 % of total production)
- Since vegetarianism is a predominant cultural trait of the dominant Gujarati communities, fish consumption within the state is very low. Available data shows that more than two-thirds of adult men and women in Gujarat have never eaten fish (National Family Health Survey 2019-21).
- Export intensity of Gujarat fisheries has increased over the years
- Domestic retail markets are not very well-developed
- The state has mainly specialized in the trading of processed fish including dried fish. Even after the emergence of modern seafood industries, dried fish continues to be the leading processed item exported out of Gujarat. Close to half of the total marine fish landings in the state are converted to dried items (cured or reduced) and traded in domestic and international markets.



Export to Production Ratio -2005/06 to 2020/21



Women in Gujarat Fisheries

- In upstream operations, women contribute to post-harvest processing like sorting, cleaning and drying, while in the downstream they actively participate in the retail marketing.
- Women's contribution to processing activities is usually assumed away in the commercial valuation of dried fish as insignificant or without any opportunity cost. The dominant social norms undervalue women's work as a natural extension of 'normal domestic' duties and hence consider it as unwaged family labour
- At the retail end a number of women struggle to stay afloat in highly competitive and price-volatile markets running petty self employment or own account establishments not licensed or recognised by the authorities

- They deal with low volumes and low profits, under binding institutional constraints imposed by the prevailing community gender norms about their conduct, mobility and opportunities as well as administrative commands that are blind to their specific needs and priorities
- Their labour at the post harvesting phase helps downstream players to augment margins; As retail traders women bear the burden of sustaining consumption and food security
- Recurrent income shocks, untimely death of spouses, unemployment of children, especially sons, and increasing cost of living have all resulted in drawing women, the major reserve workforce in the fishing communities, into market-based activities

	Men	Women
Fishing	77943	
Marketing	3703	19475
Making/preparing net	1894	2340
Curing/processing /peeling	1045	5497
Peeling	424	4627
Labour	9371	9698
Other	1215	661

Distribution of fishing and allied activities by Gender (Gujarat, 2016)

Visible in data, yet inconspicuous

- No proof of identity and fish workers/ fish vendors
- Women vendors within market yards face disadvantages like lower mobility, less access to training, market information, productive capital
- Fishing communities are deeply divided in most geographies with graded poverty and vulnerabilities; the most socially disadvantaged and economically marginalised fishing communities often are excluded from access to markets
- Policies do not recognise subsistence enterprises as legitimate units of intervention due to regulatory ambivalence – the focus is on ground-breaking entrepreneurship; for instance, the PMMSY offers financial assistance to women to start small scale enterprises

Systemic Issues

- Pervasive patriarchal attitudes of knowledge institutions leading to exclusions of areas of research, knowledge production and women professionals
- Inadequate consultation – for whom is knowledge generated?
- Top-down big science solutions and implicit trust superior knowledge of experts
- Increasing centralisation of resources and decisions?
- Data poverty

- Fishery sector collectives like coops have routinely excluded women leaving them to remain as passive participants in government sponsored groups; beneficiaries not right holders
- Women's collectives like fisher producer organisations vulnerable to male and elite capture
- Gender tokenism and illusion of equality/diversity

- Lack of convergence among various legislative provisions, schemes, and programmes at the union and state levels to improve the wellbeing of vulnerable and marginalized groups in the fisheries sector
- Inadequate attention to systematic integration of the small fisheries sector within the larger social and economic policy canvas
- Increased competition for resources from other sectors like tourism, aquaculture, agriculture, energy, mining, industry and infrastructure developments that seemingly have better political patronage and economic salience in the macro system

- Even when policies take cognizance of the role of women in marketing, and preservation of marine fish, it is presumed that the benefits of all schemes automatically flow to them.
- Marine fishing is increasingly defocussed in major development initiatives. In the recent state budget of Gujarat for 2022-23, only two major women-focused schemes were announced, with an allocation of just three percent of the total fisheries budget. About 97 percent of this allocation targets tribal women involved in spawn rearing in inland culture fisheries (Government of Gujarat 2023).

Overall,

- Policies tend to marginalise women by treating their labour and contribution as extension of roles of males
- Gender blind data systems
- Lack of initiatives to enable women to access and control productive resources like land, capital, and technology
- **SYSTEMIC INEQUALITY**

