



GENDER ROLES IN FISHERIES ALONG THE VEMBANAD ESTUARINE SYSTEM

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INTRODUCTION

The Vembanad estuarine system situated in the state of Kerala, India, is one of the largest in the West Coast of India. Spread across the districts of Alappuzha, Ernakulam and Kottayam, it is rich in aquatic bio-diversity. The estuarine system serves as a source of livelihood for inland fishing community. About half the total fishermen population of more than 200 thousand in the inland sector in Kerala is concentrated in these three districts.

OBJECTIVES

To identify the gender roles and activities among the fishing communities along the Vembanad estuarine system

To understand the issues and challenges faced by women in fisheries in these areas.



MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The study was carried out in Aroor and Chellanam Panchayats located in Alappuzha and Ernakulam districts of Kerala. These panchayats lie along the opposite banks of Vembanad estuary.

Methods included Key informant interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women along the Vembanad estuarine system are involved in both harvest and post-harvest activities.

Harvest Activities

Women harvest fish from the channels of Vembanad estuary using Vattavala, small pots and bamboo baskets.

The women belong to the 40 to 70 age group and younger women are not involved in harvest activities, indicating a lack of interest in the same.

The main catches include pearlspot, prawns, pallathi, catfish etc..



Post-harvest Activities

Women in Aroor area are involved in sorting of fish caught by their husband or other close relatives from the Vembanad lake. This catch is also marketed by the women.

Sorting activities are considered as a family affair and even girls are engaged in this activity.

Women in the age group of 20 - 40 years are engaged only in prawn peeling activities. While doing the sorting activities distribution of work among the children and other family members help in strengthening the family relationships.

Marketing is also mainly carried out by women. After taking a share for household consumption the catch is taken to the market for auctioning. A commission of 10 percent is paid to the auctioneers. Decision making power regarding consumption and selling of fish caught is vested with women

The fishing activities done by women support the family in the form of consistent income throughout the year as compared to their male counterparts whose incomes are not regular and consistent as they are engaged in marine fishing

Men also accompany women while they go for fishing. They use castnet (Veeshuvala) for fishing and some do fishing and marketing together.

One of the major constraints faced by women involved in fishing in these areas is the nature and time of work. They leave home to work place in the early morning leaving their children alone at home and children go to school before their return. This creates a sense of insecurity among the women who have school going children. Another issue they confront is the distance from their home to the work place. The women have to walk more than 8 to 10 kms to reach their work place as no transportation facility is available in the early morning.

Channels owned by private individuals near their houses are restricted areas and women are not allowed to fish from there. Provision for fishing from these will result in the women having to travel lesser distances for fishing activities. However there are legal issues with respect to access to 'apparently' common property resources, but being used exclusively by private individuals.

Timing/ Gender	4.00 to 6.00 am	6.00 to 8.00 am	8.00 to 10.00 am	10.00 am to 12.00 pm	12.00 to 2.00 pm	2.00 to 4.00 pm	4.00 to 6.00 pm	3.00 to 4.00 am
Women	Harvesting Sorting	Harvesting Sorting	Auctioning and Marketing Peeling	Household Work Peeling	Household Work Peeling	Leisure	Leisure	Getting ready for Fishing
Men		Harvesting						Getting ready for Fishing

Time analysis
of men and
women