

SUSTAINABLE EMPOWERMENT MODELS FOR GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN MARINE FISHERIES OF KERALA

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Empathy offers little role in reducing gender inequity in terms of hunger, malnutrition, health care, access to education and poverty in the fisheries sector. The uncertainty prevalent in marine fisheries impinges on the already poverty stricken households of fisherfolk and quite often women are the ultimate victims and are forced to undertake additional work to support the family. Women's roles are significant but limited in marine fisheries to post harvest handling, marketing, pre-processing and processing in the secondary sector. Concerted efforts with credit backing and capacity building are required for their social, economic and political empowerment. This paper gives an insight into the marginalisation of women in the marine fisheries sector and suggests a suitable alternative sustainable model of participatory endeavours, derived from the institutional interventions in Kerala. In general, the socio-economic status of fisherfolk is frequently monitored in people-centered development efforts but even this does not give due attention to the women due to the lack of disaggregated data. Female employment is almost non-existent in active fishing and not significant in the tertiary sector. Women employed in the secondary sector form 10 per cent of the total fishing sector population and 21 per cent of the total employed fisherfolk in coastal fishing villages in India. In Kerala, almost half of the secondary sector workforce is women. This involvement results from the export marketing channels in Kerala, which is regarded as the "seafood export hub" in India, and employs many female workers in pre processing and packing activities.

While the statistics do not provide information on the extent of marginalization of women in this sector, instances of gender specific vulnerability are illustrated in the subject matter of the paper. Vulnerabilities include: competition due to new technologies not being accessible to women, lack of infrastructure, wage disparities against women, the additional women's burdens of household tasks compared to men, the contractual nature of women's labour, lack of collective bargaining power, adverse attitudes of men in supporting families coupled with alcoholism, and inadequate facilities leading to ergonomic problems. In spite of constant efforts by State and other developmental agencies, mainstreaming of women in economic activities is weakened by several causes including lack of finance and participatory modes of community action for furtherance and sustenance. Generally, the mainstreaming interventions are not sustainable since there is a stigma associated with them and, once the institutional support is withdrawn, the developmental effort does not persist.

In this context, some of the developmental efforts routed to the fisheries sector have been critically examined to determine their efficacy in serving the targeted population. Sustainability is analysed in the broad perspectives of output, systems and innovation orientation. Micro credit, which has proved that "the poor are also bankable" by nation wide and international experiences, has reduced vulnerability, initiating "pro-poor growth", and is sustainable, if backed by training and empowerment. In addition, women's group endeavours have successfully promoted output oriented, systems oriented and innovation oriented sustainability. This has occurred when linkages are either maintained or progressively developed to achieve self sufficiency. As a gender mainstreaming initiative, women entrepreneurship involving men also as active partners and facilitators should be encouraged. A model involving these factors is replicable in the horizontal expansion of women's empowerment efforts in fisheries sector.