

GENDER AND FISH SUPPLY CHAINS-TRANSFORMING THE ECONOMY THROUGH GENDER RELATIONS, A CASE FROM SRI LANKA

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The Post Tsunami Coastal Rehabilitation and Resources Management Program (PTCRRMP) funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has been implementing a gender responsive micro enterprises development program in tsunami affected areas of Sri Lanka. This paper addresses gender and fish supply chains in one intervention. The project site is Thotamuna, a coastal village in the Matara District of the southern Sri Lanka. This paper analyses a case of how gender relationships work in a fish supply and distribution value chain. The intervention is supported by Institute of Development Alternatives and Reconciliation Ltd (iDAr- The Service Provider) within the PTCRRMP-IFAD framework.

Thotamuna is a fishing village of 800 people. The majority of households in Thotamuna are classified as below the poverty line. Among adults, 290 are men and 590 women. 189 people died due to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, 150 of whom were female.

The traditional economy in Thotamuna is based on a fish supply chain. Fishing is the main source of household income. In Thotamuna, household food security (income) depends on gender relationships. Fishing generates the value chain. Fish are caught by men engaged in coastal and marine fishing. A large portion of the fish stock is unprocessed and sold directly to middlemen. Research revealed that income generated by this activity is not sufficient to provide for household well-being. Households are managed by women and the social relationship between women and men forms a basis for gender-based overarching economic relationships in the village that could ultimately increase the well-being of the family. Gender relationships open-up the opportunity for reducing the poverty levels of households. Although a large portion of the fish caught by men is directly sold to middlemen - in a traditional and difficult-to-break trade cycle - a small portion of it is sold to village women. The women in Thotamuna have traditional skills and technologies for processing fish into value added products such as *Ambulthiyal*, *Jadi*, *Dried Fish* and *Umbalakada* (Maldives Fish) that brings in complementary income.

The processed fish-based products of women have a great potential to develop into multiple business value chains that benefit the local economy as they are in high demand in the local market, urban supermarkets and in the markets abroad. The processed fish based products quote high prices especially, in higher end markets. Undertaking a micro business development intervention on fish-based products manufactured by women creates the opportunity to improve the economy and household well-being. Increasing the processed fish-based production will gradually reduce the amount of fish going to middleman at a lower price, without creating a conflict with the existing trade pattern. Over time the existing primary trade pattern of the village could be replaced by a production economy based on a gender relationship. Such a production economy will add value through the involvement of women with the fish caught by men. It could create a gradual transition of the village economy engaging and increasing the participation of women. The process will form a strong social and economic relationship between women and men and result in the increased household food security.

The gender-based micro enterprises intervention appears to be a realistic undertaking. A cluster-based approach will be used in which gender-relationship based value chains can be developed within the village. The fish based processed products can be linked up with the urban and export markets that would create a number of value additions to the business relationships.

- a. Fish stock – processed primary products- further processing (quality improvement, product development etc.) within the village
- b. Fish stock – processed primary products- further processing by external (perhaps large scale) enterprises
- c. Fish stock –processing- packaging- branding- sales to wholesalers
- d. Fish stock –processing- packaging –branding- urban supermarkets/international markets
- e. Fish stock –processing-packaging –branding –sales to direct consumers through own outlet