



Women in fisheries sector: A case of pulicat lake

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Abstract

The present paper discusses about the findings of the research study funded by the University Grants Commission. The aim of the study was to highlight the socio-economic conditions of fisher women in the Pulicat village of the Tiruvallur district. The primary source for the research was collected with the help of interview schedule and structured questionnaire relating to size of the family, occupation, level of income, land holding, level of education, living conditions, health status, social contact, etc. The secondary sources of data were collected from the published books, journals and Internet to supplement the study.

Keywords

Fisheries sector, pulicat lake.

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1. Introduction

The fisheries sector in India has grown substantially over the past few decades. It has been experiencing a boom and is contributing to the economic growth of the nation. About 6 million fishers are dependent on fisheries for their livelihood in India (Amita Saxena, 2011) [1]. The total fisher population in Tamil Nadu has 27.60 cents. The fish eater's population is minimal to 27 percent in Tamil Nadu where the vast potential fish is traded to other states [2]. It is interesting to note that about 48.8% of the fisher folk in the state are women. There are 460 Fisheries Co-operatives run by them with a membership of 2,50,276 women indicating a high level of women participation [3]. Fisher women engage themselves in seaweed collection in addition to the traditional jobs of fish curing, marketing, net making and prawn seed collection. Aquaculture activities can be pursued by the rural women folk at convenient leisure time without being a detriment to their routine. More effort is to be put towards filling the gaps in programme planning rather than programme implementation. The various issues challenging empowerment of fisherwomen

have to be seriously taken into consideration while chalking out new development strategies. Women empowerment and the community development through combined efforts require a holistic approach.

The present paper discusses about the findings of the research study funded by the University Grants Commission. The aim of the study was to highlight the socio-economic conditions of fisher women in the Pulicat village of the Tiruvallur district. The primary source for the research was collected with the help of interview schedule and structured questionnaire relating to size of the family, occupation, level of income, land holding, level of education, living conditions, health status, social contact, etc. The secondary sources of data were collected from the published books, journals and Internet to supplement the study. Before proceeding to the targeted community, much of the time was spent in the village, a meeting was organized by the Principal Investigator for the research study. An interactive session was also held with the participants to create awareness on the schemes and provisions available to safeguard for the interest of women in the field of economic activity by the Government. Interviews were conducted with the fisher women of the selected villages of Pulicat. The data was collected through systematic approach with the help of structured questionnaire schedule. About 500 samples were collected representing the 52 villages. Fisherwomen who involved in the collected of prawn, fish segregation, fish auction, fish loading, fish retail sales, fish wholesale businesses, fish export were interviewed. The frequency analysis of the questionnaire samples were analysed with the help of statistian and interpreted to infer the important findings. The data visualization was done with the

help of computer graphics. The entire lifestyle, living conditions of fisherwomen of Pulicat were captured as video. The interviews and focus group discussions were video graphed and prepared as a documentary by the Principal Investigator.

2. Fisher women of pulicat

There are about 52 villages surrounding Pulicat lake. The people dwelling in these villages depend on the lake for their livelihood. Fisher men use net fishing in Pulicat lake. The total population of Pulicat is 17925 and there are about 4619 houses. The total female population is 50.3% (9010) and the literacy rate is 66.8% (11970). The female literacy rate is 31.5% (5650). The working population is 36.6%. The Padu Systems or Net Fishing is a traditional system of granting settlements to eligible members of a particular community for undertaking fishing activities in the lake [4]. This provides equal share of resources of the lake.. During summer seasons prawn catches are low whereas in monsoon the yield of prawn is high [5]. The Global Nature Fund has nominated Pulicat as the Threatened Lake of the Year, 2010. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) declared Pulicat as a protected area [6]. On 11th December 1996, Supreme Court made a historic decision by prohibiting the construction of shrimp culture ponds within the Coastal Regulation Zone and within 1000 metres of Chilka lake and Pulicat Lake except improving traditional ponds (United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation) [7].

3. Findings of the study

The research study was undertaken to find out the effectiveness of the Government schemes and programmes for the fisher women of Pulicat. About 499 samples were collected through structured questionnaire method. The researcher adopted simple random sampling technique through lottery method to collect samples from 52 villages of Pulicat.

- 92.99% of the respondents were aware of the Marine Fishing Policy
- 94.79% agreed that Government of India should ban Indian Fisherman from Fishing in Other Countries' Waters
- 97.39% Expect that Indian Government should provide more facilities to Fishermen considering the risks Involved in their Profession
- 98.20% were aware of the advantages of having vessel monitoring systems on Board
- 96.79% were willing to fit Vessel Monitoring System In their vessel with Government subsid
- 97.39% Agreed that the Government has alerted and evacuated people during calamities
- 98.00% Agreed to the Vessel Registration and licensing policy
- Only 0.60% were satisfied with the Government welfare policies to the Fishermen Communities
- 98.40% Expressed that Government should provide modern storage facilitie
- Only 0.40% agreed that the Insurance coverage schemes not satisfied by majority of the fishermen communities
- None satisfied with the Monetary Compensation for Ban Period
- 98.40% felt that the Government should formulate more effective policies to help the growth of Mariculture Farming
- None satisfied with hygiene standards of storage facilities available
- All agreed that the middle men are exploiting fishermen by paying less for their yield supplied
- All agreed that export of Indian Fish Products provide maximum profits than the retail selling In local markets
- 98.40% Agreed that small fishes are being utilized without wastage
- 99.20 % Agreed that Indian Fish products should improve quality to attract International Markets
- 100.00% Agreed that there was a growing decline In the yield /catches
- 14.23% women are interested In joining Fishing Industry
- 14.03% were able to market their Goods without wastage
- All felt that Government need not reduce the ban period of fishing
- 11.42% felt that compensation paid by the Government for the ban period Is sufficient
- 98.80% Agreed that Fishery resources are exhaustive
- 99.20% Agreed that there is depletion of marine resources
- 100.00% Agreed that uncontrollable harvest will exhaust marine resources
- 99.20% Agreed that the Pollution of Marine waters are due to dumping of waste Into the Seas
- 100.00% Agreed that there are sufficient steps taken for protection of maritime Industry
- 100.00% Agreed that growing of mangroves will help prevent flooding Into residential areas of coastal vil-lages



- 100.00% Accepted that developing artificial coral reef helps In Improving the catches
- 100.00% Agreed that developing hatcheries was helpful for Increasing the yield In catches
- 100.00% were aware of the effects of marine pollution

4. Conclusion

Thus it can be concluded that the low educational attainment and socio-cultural constraints hamper the full participation of women in development activities of the fisheries sector. Their ability to use and access available information is affected due to ignorance poverty and illiteracy. The lack of competence and ability, affects their self-confidence in independently pursuing projects. The remarkable functioning of NGOs in training the fisher women have improved their self confidence level but unfortunately the fisher community are stranded with poor socio economic conditions.

In the fisheries sector the participation of women before and after fish capture has been given little importance, leading to the invisibility of women as economic contributors to the fishery sector. Women are seen working in net mending, sorting of fishes upon landing, fish retail selling, trading, auctioning fishes in the market, processing and preservation by salting, pickling or drying. It has been observed that men are involved in marketing activities mainly while dealing with intermediaries and when the fish caught is of high commercial value. Otherwise women handle the small scale marketing that involves inexpensive fish varieties. Fish processing and preservation is mainly the arena of women because fisher men go to the deep sea during odd hours and return. Fisherwomen take over the role from unloading the fishes from the boats and segregating the fishes according to their sizes and categories. Then they transport the fishes to the auction centre. Senior women who have experience in the fisheries involve in the auction. Whoever bids for the highest price will be given the catches. Both men and women are seen sharing the work. While the men catch fishes, women ensure that it is made use properly. There are some fisherwomen who venture into the lake through night and catch shrimps and crabs. They encounter several dangerous situations like snakes, insects and other creatures sting them when they have to remain stand still to catch prawns. Their hands have scars of stings from prawns. It is seen that India has been leading in shrimp export globally. Despite working for longer hours the amount that each family gets end of the day is Rs 200/- to Rs 400/- which includes the labour of the men and women. It is clear that the fishers are being exploited by middlemen and commission agents who are responsible in selling the catches. They take commission from the fishers and the buyers. Therefore it is the need of the hour that government eradicates the inference of middlemen and the fishers could fix their own price based on their yield.

During the off season and the breeding period for the fishes known as ban period the fishers are prohibited from venturing

into sea and the Tamil Nadu Fisheries Department remits Rs. 5000/- to each fisherman family as compensation. The 61 day ban on fishing is aimed at protecting and rejuvenating the marine resources. This ban period is effective from April 15 to June 14 on the east coast every year. On the west coast it is effective from June 1 to July 31 [8]. Although the Government gives compensation during the ban period, it is not sufficient for the poor fisher families. During such situations the fisherwomen seek informal credit from relatives and neighbours. The banks and other formal credit institutions recognize men as borrowers but women financially support their families by borrowing through informal community links. They tend to do all kinds of alternate jobs like cattle rearing, agriculture, poultry, selling of dairy products assisting in groceries shop, involve in making palm leaf products as SHGs.

It is clear from the study that the post-capture activities, such as fish marketing and processing which women have assumed, depend only on the catch. It requires capitalization which the poor fishing households cannot afford. If the government provides free training and technical assistance to the fishers in aquaculture, storage facilities and seed production they will be able to learn the skills in a better manne.

The silting of the river mouths leading to its close is proving detrimental to the fishers as it is affecting the catch negatively. The Tamil Nadu government has not taken steps to desilt the lake is causing much unrest amongst these communities. Besides certain unscientific practices are also proving to be problematic to the environment and ecosystem making themselves vulnerable again. Lack of adequate technological upgradation as regards fishing techniques and equipment, are another concern as the competition with the marine fishermen are increasing and eventually the traditional practices are losing out. Despite earning hardly Rs.200-300, these traditional fishers cannot imagine leaving this occupation as they believe it is the only thing that they are familiar with and skilled in [9]. Industrial pollution has affected the lagoon. The Arani and Kalangi rivers carried fertilizers, petrochemical waste and pesticides. Crab culture ponds and fish processing industries discharge effluents into the lake. Toxic fly ash and hot water from North Chennai Thermal Power Station is a major source of pollution. Two harbours have propped up along the coast. They are the Kamarajar Port and Larson & Toubro's (L&T) Kattupalli Port. These shipyards have made the mangroves scanty.

5. Recommendations and suggestions

1. The interference by commission agents must be strictly eradicated
2. Fisher's economic contributions must be recognized as productive work and included in the GDP of the country.
3. Fisherwomen should be paid on hourly basis with minimum wages fixed for per hour.



4. Compensation for deceased members should be carried out without delay.
5. Jobs can be given to the fisherwomen on compassionate grounds based on their skill and talents.
6. Separate provision of sheds or space to market their goods should be given
7. Ban period subsidy to be increased based on the International Labour Laws on an average of Rs. 150/- per day for 61 days as Rs 9150/-.
8. The educated fishers should be given first preference in jobs pertaining to fisheries as they have practical experience and knowledge both in Centre and State Government jobs.
9. NGOs working among fishers must be motivated to provide free training and skill based training to fisherwomen.
10. Academic institutions should be encouraged to have collaborative research with international agencies, and institutions which could be funded by the Centre Government to have exposure in current advanced techniques which could be adopted in fisheries sector
11. Students from academic institutions should be encouraged to create Awareness programmes as part of National Service Scheme and National Cadet Corps and additional credits to be added.
12. Frequent awareness programmes on environment protection and sustainable development programmes to be conducted as service learning for school and college students and it should be made mandatory.
13. Protection of water resources from pollution should be made stringent with severe punishments with fine and closure of such industries which are indulged in pollution.
14. Heavy fines on vessels which are causing oil spillage without following the international covenants of sea laws to be followed on countries which fail to maintain the standards.

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