

Gender issues in the fisheries sector of India

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Currently, India is the second-largest fish producing country in the world and second-largest aquaculture producing nation. With regards to aquaculture, India is also a major producer of fish, second after China. Total fish production during 2016-17 was 11.41 million metric tonnes (mmt) with a contribution of 3.64 mmt from the marine sector, and 7.77 mm from inland. Fishing and fish farming in India is a primary industry and provides employment to over 14 million people. India's freshwater resources consist of 2.9 million hectares of minor and major reservoirs, 2.4 million hectares of ponds and lakes, 195,000 kilometers of rivers and canals, and around 800,000 hectares of flood plain wetlands and water bodies.

Women play an essential role in the fisheries sector in India. They make an immense contribution by engaging in varied activities. They may engage as paid or unpaid workers both in pre and post-harvest activities, in seafood processing plants, as caregivers of the fisher family - maintaining social networks and culture of the community and as members of fish worker movements and fisher's organisations such as the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers. However, the extent to which interests, needs, and concerns of fisherwomen are given attention is questionable. Because of this reason, the need for gender studies and mainstreaming gender equality in the fisheries sector is highly necessary.

Although women perform a significant part of the activities in agriculture and allied industries, their contribution often remains invisible or understated. Women are burdened with triple responsibilities or roles, referring to the productive, reproductive, and community management roles that they perform. Productive tasks include the activities undertaken for producing goods and services also for sale, exchange, or to meet the current needs of the family. Reproductive roles include actions required for maintenance of household and reproduction of society's labour force. Examples are child rearing, care of family members, socialisation of young, cooking, and so on. Community roles are an extension of women's reproductive roles to ascertain the maintenance and provision of limited assets of collective consumption, such as health care, education, water, and fuel. Both men and women play multiple roles. However, there is a significant difference in that men tend to perform their work sequentially, but women usually play their roles simultaneously, balancing the demand within their limited time constraints (ILO). In the Indian Himalayas, it is estimated that over the course of a year on a one-hectare farm a pair of bullocks works an average of 1,064 hours, a woman works 3,485 hours, and a man works only 1,212 hours, a figure that illustrates the significance of women's contribution to agricultural production. (Shiva FAO, 1991).

Gender is a means of understanding how society operates through the study of the negotiation of power roles and influence between men and women. Despite the considerable efforts at promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming within the organisational structures of policymakers

and change agents, there are still considerable gaps in our knowledge of gender relations in the fisheries sector and how these are affected by the change (Bennette, 2004). Even with the growing recognition that women do fish, there remains an imperative to engage in more meaningful and relevant gender analysis to improve socio-ecological approaches to fisheries research and management. Beyond gender difference in fishing practices throughout the world, the literature reveals a quantitative data gap in the characterisation of gender in small-scale fisheries (Kleiber, 2015).

What is meant by gender issues in fisheries?

Gender issues refer to any issue determined by gender-based differences between women and men fishers.

It includes all concerns related to women's and men's:

- Lives and their situation in society.
- Way to interrelate each other.
- Differences in access to and control over resources.
- Activities in fisheries, and response to changes, interventions and policies.

Although women contribute heavily in the sector, their work is often referred to as 'invisible' and does not receive due recognition. The percentage of women in the fisheries workforce is 46 % globally and 72% in India (FAO, 2016). The fisher population sex ratio is 928 women to 1,000 men in the maritime states of India (CMFRI census). Among the women engaged fishing-related activities in India, 57% participate in fish seed collection, 73.6% in marketing, and 75.7 % in curing and processing (CMFRI, 2010). The Central Institute for Women in Agriculture (CIWA) has calculated the Gender Work Participation Disparity Index in fisheries which varies from state to state. In Nagaland, Manipur, and Himachal Pradesh it is < 0.15, whereas in Punjab, Haryana, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Odisha, it is between 0.34 and 0.59 (CIWA, 2015).

Inappropriate facilities and support services

Most workplaces, especially processing industries, mostly engage women employees. Rigidity in working hours causes difficulties for women because they are burdened with household responsibilities. If the place of work is far away, then it is too difficult for women to attend work on time. Women mostly engage in post-harvest activities; they are prone to injuries,

for example, in peeling operations. Moreover, unhygienic working conditions, lack of safe drinking water, lack of health care, and poor sanitation are among other problems.

Limited access to resources

It is seen that ownership of land and other productive resources mostly belongs to men. Statistics reveal that women's ownership of land is only 20% in developed countries and a mere 2% in developing countries (FAO, 2011); for this reason, women also lack access to credit facilities. As they require ownership of land and other productive resources as collateral, they are unable to avail credit from lending agencies. Marketing arrangements are not accessible to women because of long-distances or male dominance. Recent technological advancements in agriculture and allied sectors have focused on men as the primary stakeholders drawing women behind. So there is a lack of women-friendly technologies in the sector. Women have limited reach in availing benefits from the extension machinery. Only 5% of all agricultural extension services were received by female farmers from 97 countries, only 15% of world's extension representatives are women, and only 10% of total aid for forestry, agriculture, and fishing goes to women (FAO, 2011).

How is male migration a gender issue in fisheries?

Firstly, considering the case of male migration to other places for work, leaving women at home. In such a situation, the sole responsibility to look after the household falls on women. Furthermore, women also have to engage in earning activities if remittances sent by their partner is not sufficient. If male members of the household go deep-sea fishing, then remittances that can be received are nil for the duration of the voyage, which may cause overburden of work for women.

Another situation is male immigration. This happens in profitable ventures where women are engaged. Examples of such ventures are the collection of oysters and shells. Males migrate to such areas and take up similar activities, thereby reducing the earning possibilities of local women.

Less participation in decision making and unequal share on benefits

Women have been absent from formal decision-making platforms in fisheries, making it difficult for their livelihoods and well-being to be addressed. Sustainable transformation can be achieved if all community members, including women, participate actively in development projects. Work patterns of women include unpaid and low paid work in fisheries which are not accounted for. Proper recognition of the 'invisible work' of women is necessary to account for their contribution to the fisheries sector.

Suggestions to address gender issues

Gender disaggregated data collection is encouraged to create a clear picture of the contribution of both men and women and give due recognition to the so-called 'invisible' work of fisherwomen. This can be accelerated by gender-responsive research and gender mainstreaming course curriculums in fisheries education. Sensitisation of fishing communities on gender issues is necessary so that men do not disregard the needs, interests, and concerns of women, and women themselves become aware of their own needs and participate actively in different activities to gain benefits on an equity basis. There is a need to develop women-supportive marketing infrastructure to involve more women in the marketing chain. Collective efforts prove to be very successful. Women can participate in self-help groups and make effective use of microfinance to initiate start-up enterprises or to supplement their contribution to household income. Therefore, the formation and strengthening of women self-help groups should be encouraged. There is a need to facilitate women's access to credit and finance. Gender perspectives in fisheries are essential to upholding the needs and interests of both the genders. It can thus be a holistic approach, covering all primary production and allied sectors. There is a need to analyse and put the issues in proper perspective, generate sufficient, relevant data and transparent policies to target development action.

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