

## ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR FISHERWOMEN IN KERALA

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Every woman is an entrepreneur as she manages, organizes and assumes responsibility. Although women contribute significantly to the economy as well as to disposable household income, their socio-economic status in society is still lagging far behind that of men. Fisherwomen in Kerala are still often in poverty and caught in the 'low income trap' in spite of their long working hours and tedious work. Women have a limited role in capture fisheries, restricted mainly to activities such as seaweed collection and clam fishing in the backwaters. However, they play a much more significant role in aquaculture and all post-harvest activities in fisheries. The present study was undertaken in selected villages of Kerala state from 2003 to 2005, with the specific objectives of assessing the women's intra and inter-sectoral disparities in the wage structure, needs, constraints, ergonomic problems and entrepreneurial opportunities.

There is immense scope for women's involvement in marine and fresh water pearl production, fish seed production activities, aquaculture, small scale feed production and various activities pertaining to value addition to enhance the women's income and economic status. The role and performance of fisherwomen varies according to the nature of fishing and fishery related activities in their local area. The post harvest sector, which provides maximum employment to fisherwomen in different forms, serves as the major means of livelihood of the vast majority of women-headed households. The average annual income of a prawn peeler is Rs.9,720, which varies from Rs.500 for an occasional part time worker, to Rs.20,000 for a full-time worker.

Techno-economic empowerment through the involvement of self-propelling employment is found to be the best alternative to reduce disguised unemployment and get due recognition and status in society. The study indicates that the socio-economic status of fisher families wherein women are actively involved in one or other occupations has been improved and helped all round household development. Men-women partnership business enterprises appear to be more remunerative than women-only enterprises, and advisable for reducing the gender disparities. Women who are managers of fish trade or fish curing yards or processing units are more successful than simple wage earners. However the high degree of wage disparity between men and women for doing the same job indicates the general level of exploitation and the gender inequalities. Women prefer capacity building through need based training programmes to avert their marginalization and enhance their opportunities in the increasingly competitive fisheries business enterprises.