



WOMEN IN INLAND CAPTURE FISHERIES IN KERALA: AN ASSESSMENT

Nikita Gopal, Sonia George and P.Sruthi

ICAR-Central Institute of Fisheries Technology, Cochin-682 029, Kerala, India

ABSTRACT CODE

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INTRODUCTION

Women in fisheries value chains are generally thought to be active in the post-harvest sector. Catching or harvesting fish whether from inland or marine waters is considered to be a male preserve. Only men have been portrayed as fishing. However evidence shows that women have been traditionally involved in fishing especially subsistence fishing for meeting household food requirements. This activity is more wide spread in shallow waters along beaches and inland water bodies of various types like rivers, backwaters, lakes, estuaries, kol lands, ponds etc. This particular study was exploratory in nature to find out how women were actually engaged in fish harvesting.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Pallithode, Varapuzha, Edavanakkad and Kuzhipilli in Ernakulam district of Kerala, India.

Methods Included Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD).

CONCLUSION

The contribution of women continues to be invisible in the sector. Women in many of these activities are not even recognised as fishers. This prevents them access to many schemes including welfare schemes. Also their working hours are often odd and they seldom have time to attend the mandatory meetings that such schemes require.

Recognising the contribution of this work force which is an indelible part of the fisheries sector is important. However they continue to be insecure and informal sub-sectors of fisheries although they are fully engaged in crucial fisheries related activities..

RESULTS

Anywhere between 20 to 30 women were involved in the fishing activity in each location. The indigenous technique followed by them for catching fish is locally known as „Thappidutham'. Women catch fish using bare hands and legs. Small scoopnets are also used for trapping fish. Aluminum pots are used to store the fish. This pot is light enough to float on the surface of the water and can be easily maneuvered by the women as they wade along the area where fishing is carried out. Fish is also stored in small bag nets (called kollivala in some areas like Panangad, Mundanveli etc.) which are tethered to their waists. The activity is carried out all through the year and the catch includes fish, prawns and crabs. Women also use gillnets and castnets (veeshuvala) individually, or the kuthuvala (ahappanet) in a group of 3-4 women. Locally fabricated fishing gear like woven or bunched tender coconut eaves (kuruthola) tied to coir ropes are used in some areas for trapping fish.

Fishing activity follows the thakkam or the lunar cycle. The time when fishing starts depends on the thakkam. Depending on when the water recedes the activity is started and it goes on for four or five hours. The time of start of fishing could be as early as 4am and can go upto 9 or 10 am in 15 day cycles. Fishing is done all through the year in one water body or other, the only exception being during heavy rain as they cannot get into the water as the water levels will be very high. Since the fishing is done with their hands and feet it is essential that their torso remains above the water level.

Women fished in the kettusorpaadams. These are either prawn/fish/crab culture fields or fields that are part of the rice-fish (shrimp) culture system. In one season rice is grown and in the next generally shrimp is cultured. Fishing is also carried out in feeder canals to these kettus or close to the lakes or rivers.

In the areas surveyed it was observed that women in the age group 40 years and above were more involved in fishing activities. This indicates that it is the older women who are still active in fish harvest.

