



## **WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN THE FISH VALUE CHAIN: A MICRO LEVEL STUDY OF VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE IN INDIA**

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# Introduction



- Entrepreneurs operating in subsistence markets, especially women, are often more susceptible to external shocks than those in affluent markets.
- This paper studies the vulnerabilities and resilience of women entrepreneurs in the fish value chain.
- Value Chain Analysis is used as a heuristic model to study the links (or nodes) between production and consumption, and situate the presence of women entrepreneurs in the fish economy.
- The vulnerabilities that are associated with fish trade are studied, and the Sustainable Livelihood Approach is used to understand resilience strategies that enabled the women to survive.

# + Issues



- What are the vulnerabilities faced by the women entrepreneurs, especially while entering into fish trade?
- What are the nature and impact of shocks faced by the women entrepreneurs at different stages of the value chain?
- What strategies do they employ to mitigate the vulnerabilities, and how do these reflect levels of resilience?

# + Methods and Theory



- Expert interviews and observations in markets aided in locating women entrepreneurs along the fish value chain.
- To study the evolution, vulnerability and resilience of women entrepreneurs, detailed interviews were conducted in three locations of India – Kochi (Kerala), Cuddalore (Tamil Nadu) and Chennai (Tamil Nadu) -- the first located on the west coast and the other two, east coast of India .



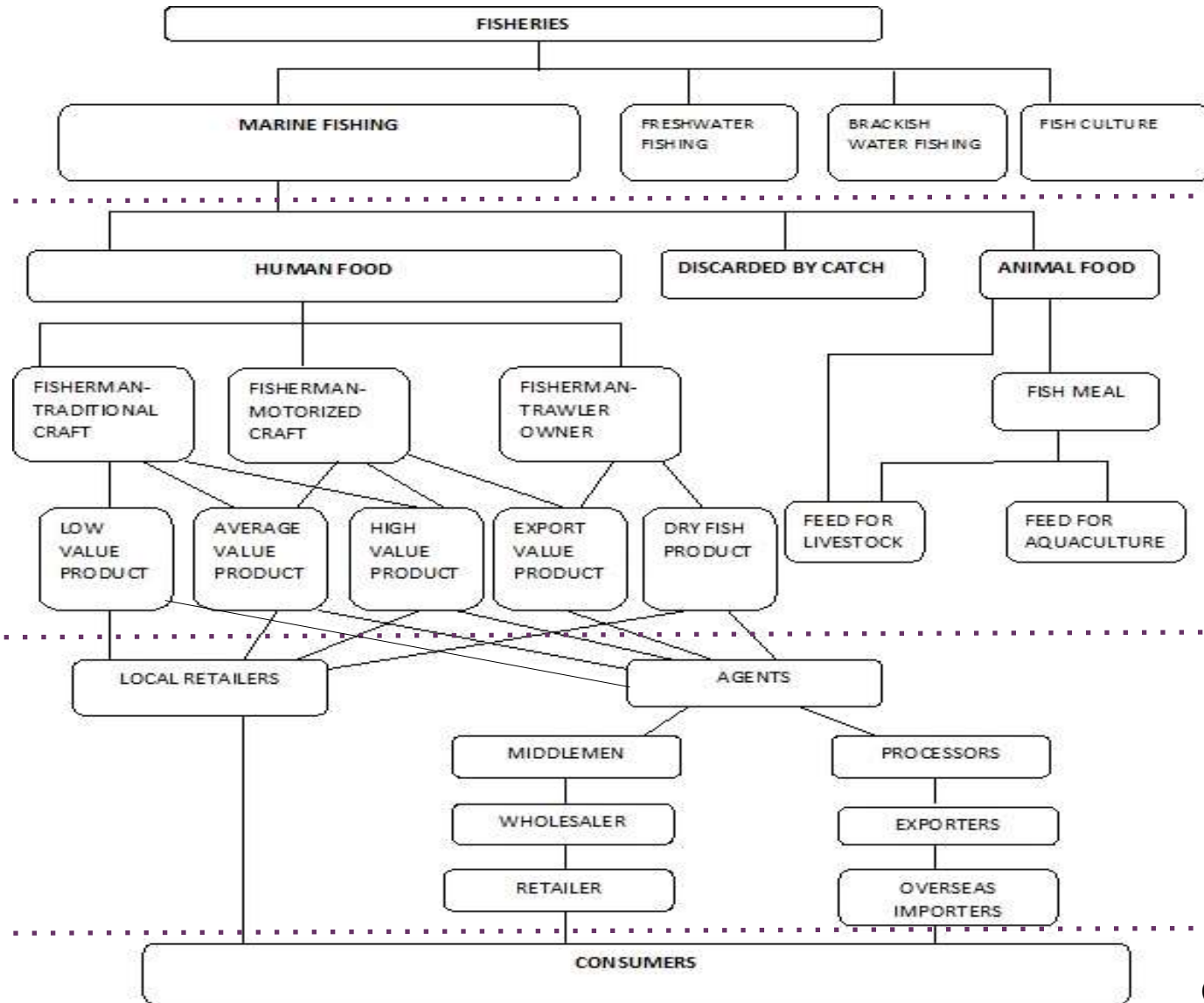
# Key concepts

- Role of women in fish value chain.
- Commodity Chain Analysis – to understand the organizational and spatial structure and dynamics of food industries across geographic scale.
  - Bair (2009)
- Feminist Commodity Chain Analysis' to understand the gendered divisions of labour and the social binding associated with the fish value chain
  - Hapke (2012)
- Vulnerability
  - Svensson (2000)
- Resilience
  - Allison and Ellis (2001)
  - Kelly and Adger (2000)





# Fish Value Chain





# Fish Value Chain and Role of Women



- Hapke (2001), drawing on Nayak (1986, 1993), speculates that the original role of women (from the artisanal communities) in the fish value chain constituted an extension of their domestic duties, wherein fish was exchanged for other goods for domestic consumption.
- Despite increasing commercialization of trade and greater profitability of marketing compared to harvesting, fish-marketing hasn't been re-gendered as masculine (Hapke, 2001).
- Bair (2009) uses an analytical framework called "Commodity chain analysis" to study a commodity from its production to consumption.
- Hapke (2012), used 'Feminist Commodity Chain Analysis' to understand the gendered divisions of labour and demonstrates how the extent of men's responsible participation in household budgets influences women's livelihood choices.

# + Vulnerability & Resilience



## ■ Vulnerability

- In the value chain literature, vulnerability is defined as the existence of disturbances that lead to deviations from normal, expected or planned activities, which cause negative effects or unsavoury consequences for the actors involved (Svensson, 2000).

## ■ Resilience

- Resilience refers to the ability of an ecological or livelihood system to “bounce back” from stress or shocks. (Allison and Ellis, 2001)
- Social resilience is defined as the ability of groups or communities to cope with external stresses and disturbances as a result of social, political and environmental change (Kelly and Adger, 2000).



# + Livelihoods Approach



- The livelihoods approach (Ashley and Carney, 1999) captures the links between individual or household assets, the activities in which households can engage in, given an asset class, making it a good fit for studying fish value chain, where the linkages between trade and the artisanal community are very strong.
- A fundamental precept of the approach is that it seeks “to identify what the poor have rather than what they do not have” and “[to] strengthen people's own inventive solutions, rather than substitute for, block or undermine them” (Moser, 1998)
- Hence a more holistic understanding of the systems and the complexities surrounding fisherfolk’s adaptive strategies (Allison and Ellis, 2001).

# + Data Description



	<b>Kochi</b>	<b>Cuddalore</b>	<b>Chennai</b>
No. of Women traders	8	6	18
Avg. Age	61 (36-72)	51 (38- 69)	52(38-65)
Avg. Experience in Fisheries	28	27	32
Fisheries as family background	8	3	10



# Findings: Presence of women in the fish-value-chain



- Women found in processing and marketing.
- Scale of operations women are involved in – wide, from export to street vending!
- Vulnerabilities exist across the spectrum of trade, irrespective of scale.
- Most of them are from the fishing community, but this changes as we move away from the coast.
- Even others had some linkages to the fish trade to help them get started.
- “Social Embeddedness” – strength or weakness?
  - Insider – outsider
  - Fish trade being gendered – implications for women from non-fishing communities as a career.
- Average age is on the higher side, diminishing number of new entrants.
- Markets are not friendly when it comes to amenities for women.

# + Findings: Reasons for Starting fish trade

	<b>Kochi</b>	<b>Cuddalore</b>	<b>Chennai</b>
Survival	7	6	15
Aspirational	1		3

- Vulnerability arising out of a familial reason
- Death of spouse
- Abandonment
- Illness
- Divorce (though rarely)
- Indifference / inefficiency of husband



# Resilience and Ambition!

- The women entrepreneurs ensure their resilience to various shocks by using a combination of the capitals and strategies.
- Starting out in fish trade out of desperation Vs. Choice out of ambition
  - Individual agency – some don't feel “helplessness or desperation”
  - *“Since I had a small family and responsibility of my daughter was met quite early, I was able to concentrate on the business. I have helped 5 boys get educated while working for me and try to support women retailers with extended credit” – Nagamalli, Wholesale trader*
  - *“I was unemployed before marriage but took over my mother-in-law's business after she became sick. My customers know I bring fresh catch from my village unlike most selling iced fish here. I finish my stocks by 11 and am back in time for lunch” – Manjula, retail trader inside a marketplace*
  - *“After divorce, my choices were go back to working or take a look at my father's ailing business. I have grown up hearing the exporter-talks over dinner table. I think I took to it like fish-to-water” – Priya, marine fish exporter*
  - *“My husband is a beetle-leaf trader, and saw the opportunity to start wholesale fish trade after my success with retail trade. He takes care of sourcing and distribution, along with my son-in-law.” – Asha, Wholesale and retail fish trader,*



# The issues faced by women traders:



## ■ Age and related concerns

- *“I started coming to the market with my mom since I was 10 years old. Now I can’t move around much, so I have settled down in a spot inside the market” - Vasanti, retail trader inside a market attached to landing centre.*
- *“Most women here are ageing and find it difficult to lift their baskets, some mechanism to aid the loading and unloading would be really helpful” – Asha, wholesale trader*

## ■ Perception about fish trade as a suitable profession for the next generation.

- *“Children have been given education, they should do better things” – Roslyn, small-scale trader*
- *“I came in for lack of a better choice, not my children” – Vasanthi, small-scale street vendor*
- *“Children are quite well settled” – Mullai, small scale trader*



# The issues faced by women traders:



- Vulnerabilities arising out of the market and trade itself
  - Financial reasons
    - Financing – high interest rates – “double-vatti”
    - Defaulting customers
    - Credit – Almost all manage two budgets, often at loggerheads with each other!
      - *“We manage!” – Say most of the women traders.*
      - *Maintaining healthy informal trade relations and reputation with wholesale traders over a period of time helps them to rotate credit.*
      - *“They will pay eventually... And if I ask her about skipping credit paymnet today, she will say that I was busy talking to you folks and she didn’t want to disturb... she will use that money to buy more and settle day after” – Ramaiah (accountant for a huge wholesale operation)*
      - *“You may not see them for days, but all of them eventually pay. The money always comes back” – Kalesha (wholesale trader)*



# The issues faced by women traders



- Vulnerabilities arising out of
  - Gender based ill treatment
    - *“It is part of this trade. We develop thick skins and give it back twicfold. She won’t talk back, I have to do her share of talking too” – Victora, fish trader at a minucipal market.*
    - *“I maybe old, but I am faster than these guys” – Theresa (Meenamma), streetside vendor.*
    - *“I get there early, finish my stock selection before the rush starts” – Karpagam, trader at a municipal market.*



# + Resilience



<b>Capital</b>	<b>Observations</b>
Human Capital	Complex business with the high fluctuations in supply and demand. The highly determined, ambitious and keen have higher probability of success.
Social Capital	Fisheries family back ground
Natural Capital	The emergence of a “national fish economy” helps supply though the year. The women find alternate markets and wholesalers for supply.
Financial Capital	Informal lending, availability of credit, given market reputation.
Physical Capital	Transportation and mobile telephony have helped in expanding reach and increasing efficiency

# + Discussion



- This study found that the women entrepreneurs operating in marine fisheries are considerably resilient to the various vulnerabilities they face.
- Their resilience can be attributed to a sense of desperation and also in some cases individual agency, the nature of the coping mechanisms that they possess and the kind of strategies they adopt to overcome the various shocks.
- This paves a broad opening to government and social institutions to strengthen the resilience of women entrepreneurs in the fisheries through various forms of capital support and bringing in innovative resource sharing institutions, societies and market amenities & structures.

# + Future scope



- A larger study, especially on Value Chains in land-locked markets could give a contrasting picture.
- The gendered nuances of value chain needs deeper exploration.
- Temporal movements could be studied in detail.



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