

Women as an agent of change : a case of fisherwomen in Kerala



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Introduction

- In globally , the fisheries sector change a lot , India and Kerala not except from this
- India is the second largest fish producer in the world -14.16 million metric tonnes in 2019-20.
- The contribution of fishermen and fisherwomen is palpable
- They are the leaders of change in the fisheries sector
- Yet still fisherwomen marginalized and left behind
- The contribution of women is highly devalued
- In this context, the study sought to examine and value the contribution of fisherwomen in the fishing sector, in their family and the fishing community, and as an agent of change. And also taking to account major issues they face.

Objectives

Objective 1

Role played by the womenfolk in Kerala

Objective 2

Major issues confronted by the fisherwomen in Kerala

Methodology

Primary source

- Filed observations
- FGD
- Interaction with fisherwomen
- *Sample* -25 groups
- *Study area* – Trivandrum, Kollam
- Ernakulam, Alappuzha
- *Survey period* – September 2022

Secondary sources

- Marine census 2016
- Various reports and documentation
- Various published and unpublished journals

1. Women and fisheries in India

- Fishing is a traditionally male dominated sector, however fisherwomen play a key role in fisheries sector
- Women fisher workers contribute significantly to household income and food security, and their economic contributions are often the backbone of family and community livelihoods.
- In India fisher population consist of more than 28 million , women constitute more than 12 million (fishery handbook ,2020)

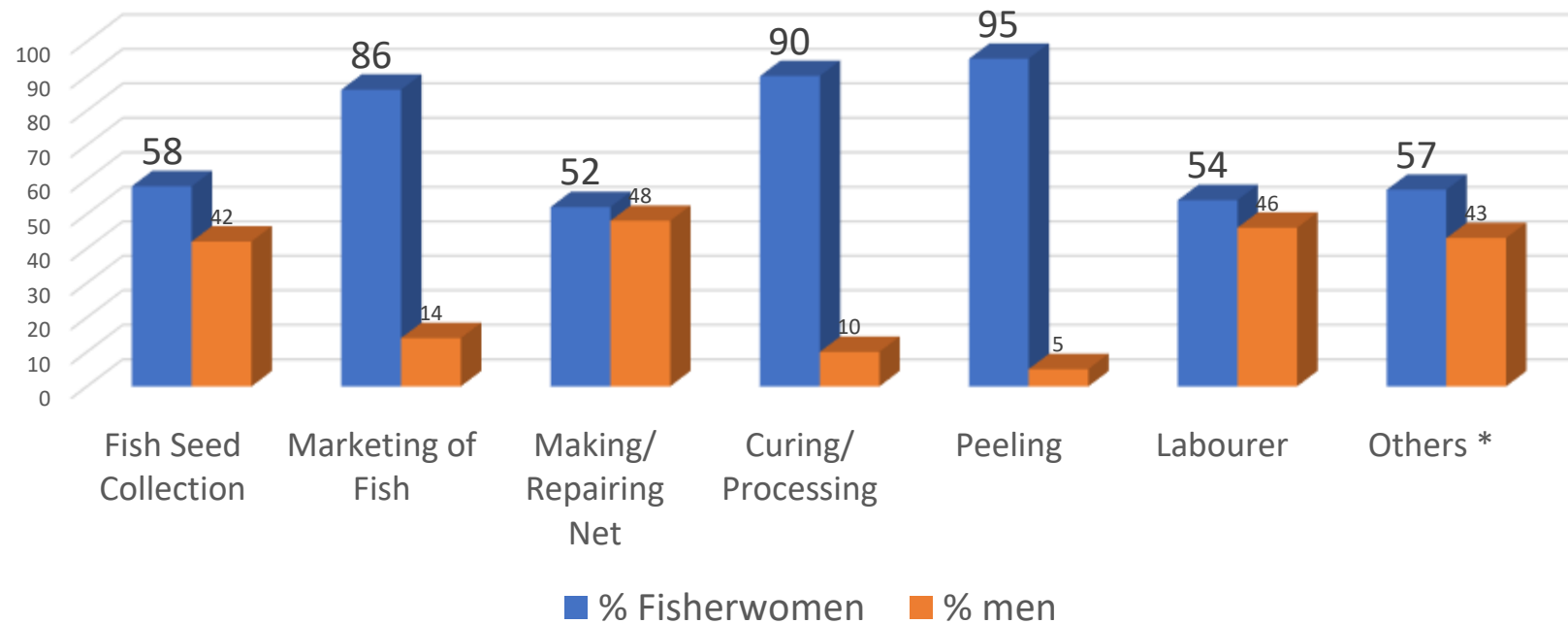
Women and fisheries in India

- Fishery is main livelihood for women in India
- In India, approximately 27% of women work in pre-harvest and post-harvest activities (UNWOMEN,2020).
- Fisherwomen the link of value chain in small scale fisheries particularly in the processing and marketing of fish and other fishery products.
- In India nearly 90 % aquaculture value chain is represented by women (Kruijssen, McDougall & van Asseldonk, 2018).

Women and fishery - India

- Women predominate in post harvest activities with 75 % participation in marine sector

Fisherfolk involved in fishing allied activities and seed collection



Results and discussion

Objective 1 : Major role played by the fisherwomen in Kerala

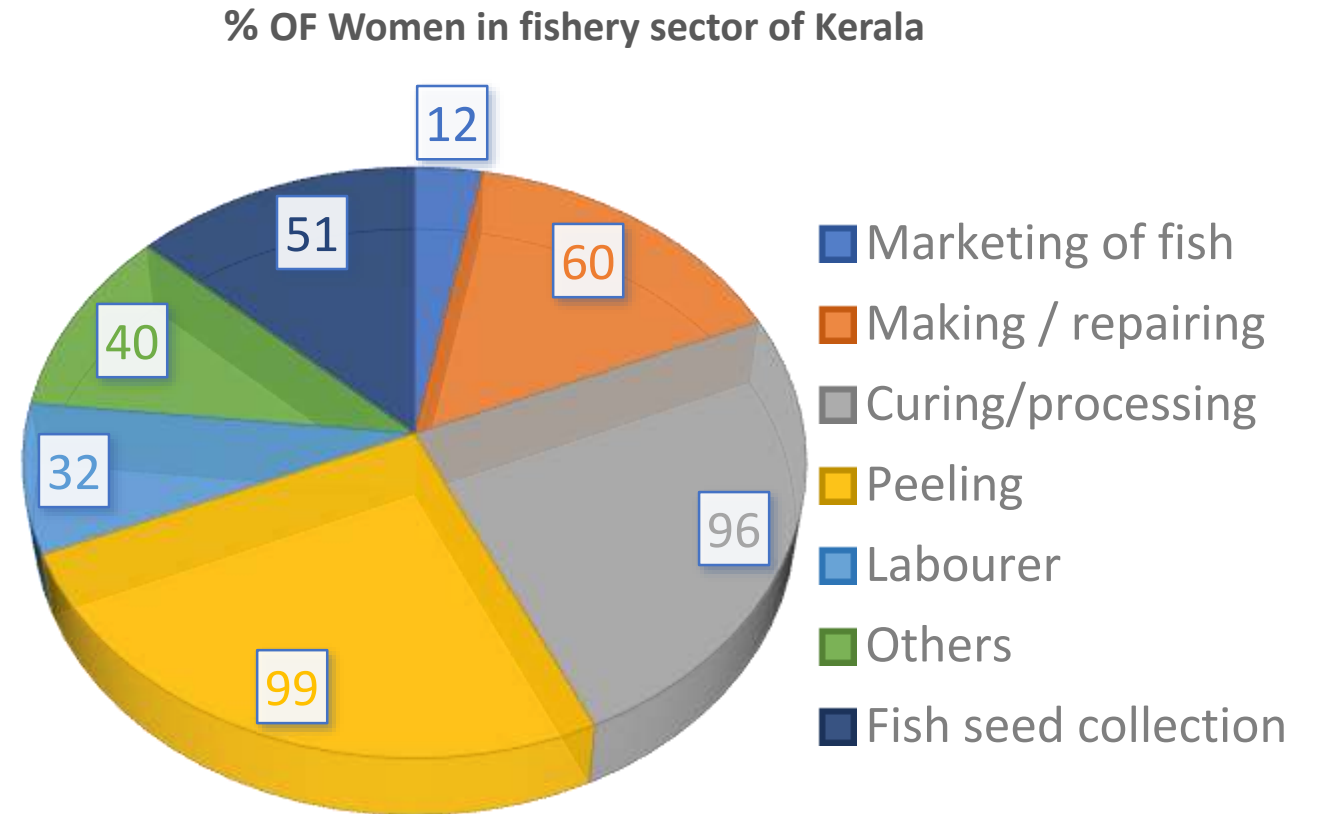
- Direct contribution
- Indirect contribution
- Contribute to demographic development parameters
- Link of value chain
- Management role
- supportive role

2.1 Direct contribution of fisherwomen in Kerala

- Fisheries sector of Kerala – ensure food security, nutrition , income generation, and sustainable economic growth
- The sector provide livelihood to 2.98 % of total population
- Provide employment to more than 3.27 lakhs people , which is 5% of labour force
- Fisherfolk population – 1.5 million, fisherwomen constitute 35 %
- Women play a predominant role in post-harvest activities in capture fisheries, while their presence is evident in all stages of culture fisheries
- 46.35 % women engaged in marine fishery and 49 % in inland fishing

2.1 Direct contribution to marine sector of Kerala

- Womenfolk dominate the fishing allied activities with 79% participation (in marine sector)
- Fish seed collection – 51 %
- The entire processing sector is highly depend on women -96 %



Direct role in culture fisheries

- More women participation is visible in inland fishing than marine sector
- Nearly 49 % engaged in land fishing
- Fisherwomen play unavoidable role in all stages of capture fisheries
- Majority of the labour force in the pre-processing and processing plants of shrimp are women.
- Women also occupy a very good proportion of the workforce in export oriented processing of cuttlefish, lobsters, and finfish varieties

2.2. Indirect contribution of women in fishery sector of Kerala

- Women play a dual role—as producers of goods and services as well as their reproductive role; wives and mothers.
- Activities like cooking, child care, child education, family health and hygiene are mostly looked after by women
- in many places' women manage petty shop, sell different inputs needed for fishing and other household articles.
- Mobile food selling units run by women in landing centres serve the purpose of supplying breakfast and snacks to fishermen

2.3 Demographic development parameters

- Giving a strong role to women contribute to economic growth, which improves child survival and overall family health, reduce fertility and thus help reduce the rate of population growth (world bank, 1984).
- Increasing participation of fisherwomen in economic activity has led to a progressive phase of demographic transition in the fishing community in particular and in Kerala in general

Parameters	Kerala	Fishing village	Fishing village (2011)
Population growth rate (decadal)	4.91(2011)	4.27 (2021)	-5.8 %
Annual population growth rate (2021)	0.49 %	0.60 % *	
Fertility rate	1.7 (2018)	NA	NA

Source: *Economic review, 2021,2011,2001; GoK,2018; <https://knoema.com/>.*

**Projected annual growth rate*

2.4 Link of value chain

- The value chain as a concept describes the full range of activities that firms, farms and workers do to bring a product from its inception to its end use and beyond
- The link between producer and consumer
- They are the distributors of fish in both urban and rural area
- It can be said that the concept of product at doorstep was first introduced by them before Amazon and Flipkart.

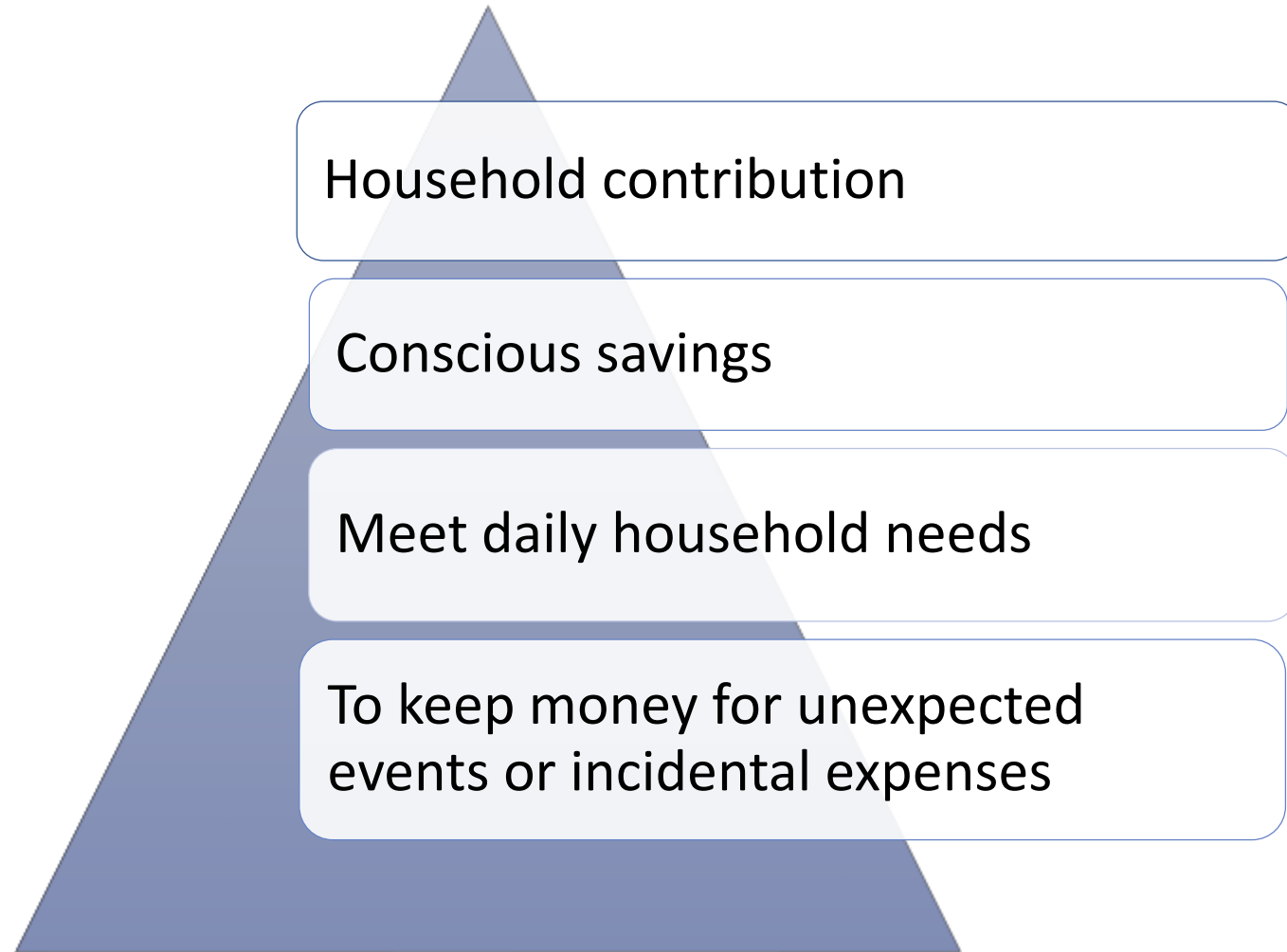
2.5 Supportive role

- Support or supplement to household income
- They help to reduce and share the household burden of counterpart



Jessie Merry sells fish on the roadside near Vizhinjam

2.3. Management role



3. Major issues confronted by fisherwomen

Poor health condition

Lack of physical and capital resources

Technological issues

Social issues

Economic issues

Lack of formal recognition

Occupational health hazards and safety concern

Institutional issue

3.1 Poor living condition

- The paradoxical situation of women contributing to high productivity but living in deplorable conditions
- Fisherwomen (excluding children) in the marine fishery sector of Kerala comprises of 1.5 % of the total female population of the state and 35 % of the fisherfolk population living in a deplorable condition
- This lack of basic amenities , use of the beach as a public toilet, and overcrowding caused by the cluster-settlement pattern also negatively affected the health and productive capacity of women and girls.
- SGD 6 – “ Ensure access and sustainable Management of water and sanitation for all”.

Settlement patter in Vizhinjam



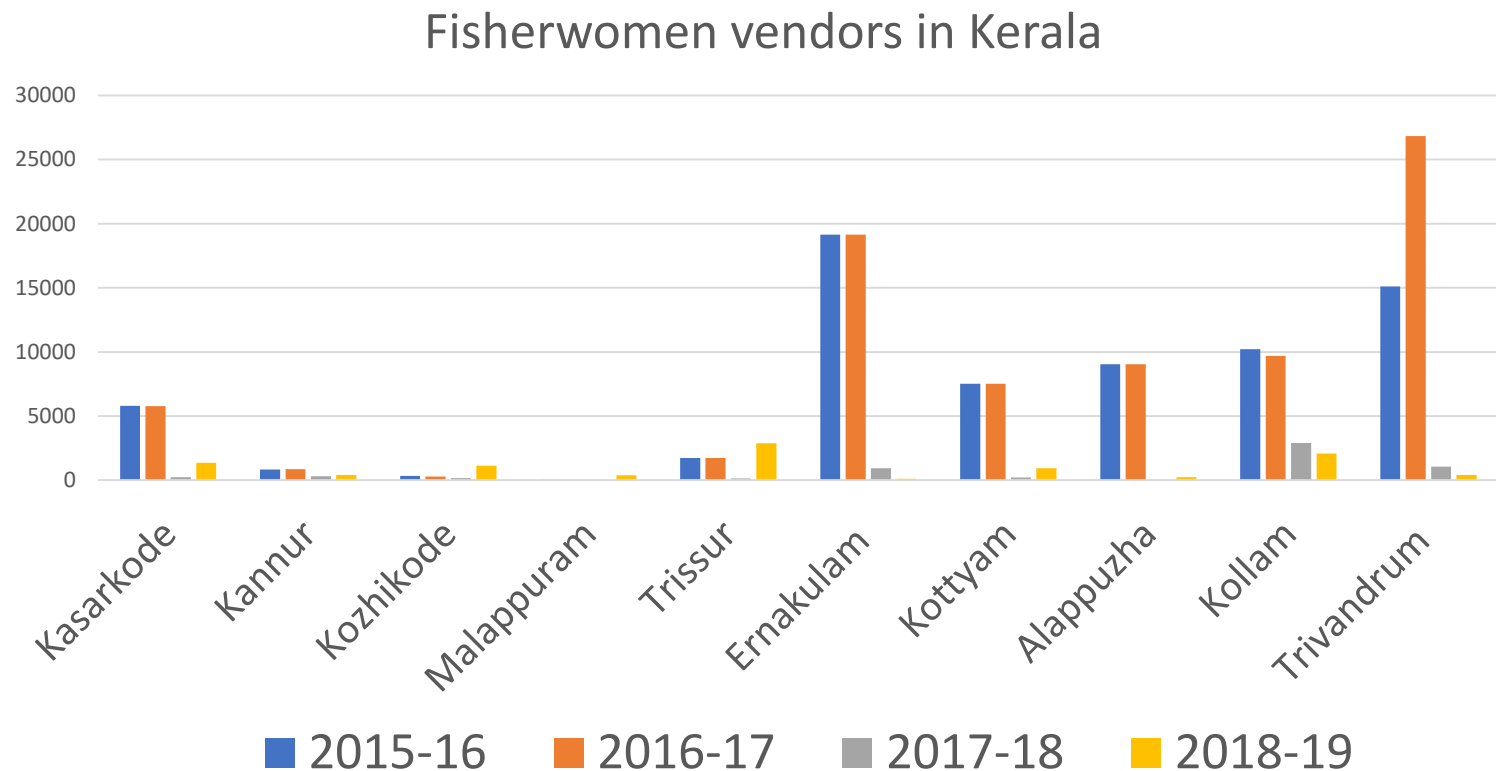
3.8 lack of capital and physical resources

- Lack of control over physical and capital resources
- Physical resources – buildings , land, craft and gear,
- Capital resource –finance and equipment's like cold storage facilities at market and landing centre etc
- Access to these critical resources and services will improve the efficiency, profitability and sustainability of their operations and vice versa.
- Lack of physical and capital resources affect their decision-making process in the public sphere also.



3.2. Technological issue

- Technologically marginalised
- Downward mobility / traditional employment is disappearing (Ashaletha et al.,2002; Meynen,1989; Rajan 2022)



Source : GoK,2020

3.3. Social issues

- Dowry
- Less literacy
- Job inconsistency
- Lack of cooperation among fishermen and family
- Fluctuation of market prices
- Unhygienic and lack of basic amenities at market places
- The high degree of wage disparity between men and women.



Rekha native of Thrissur, India's first and only licensed fisherwomen faced many social indignities in her life journey.

3.4 Economic issues

- Poor income
- Lack of any alternative employment
- Lack of proper marketing channel



3.5 **lack of formal recognition**

- Exclusion from state policies, programs and decision-making processes
- It limits their access to resources, information, training, credit, welfare measures and social protection
- **Reason for this**
- Lack of political representation of women in local bodies and other govt bodies
- Narrow definition of the term “ fishing” used in fisheries policy.

3.6 Occupational health hazards and safety concern

- women shrimp workers include fungal disease of the hands, and
- contact dermatitis, warts, black spots, blanching of skin and higher immunoglobulin levels related to asthma and chronic bronchitis among seafood processing workers
- lack of regulatory measures to safeguard the health care for fishermen is worrisome.



3.7 Institutional issues

- Lack credit access from formal institutions
- Lack of support from fisheries organisation



The ESAF agent collects weekly loan repayment from the women's group

4. Conclusion

- Womenfolk play a dual role in the fishery of Kerala – productive role and an agent of family and community change
- Despite the vital role they play, women still face many barriers to contributing to and benefiting from development
- Many gender inequalities persist even as countries develop, Calling for sustained and focused community driven approach and public action.
- Women's economic empowerment is particularly necessary as it is central to the realization of women's rights and gender equity.
- Economic freedom improves their ability to participate equally in existing markets; their access to and control over productive resources, access to decent work; increased voice, and meaningful participation in decision-making at all levels, from the family to the public domain

4.1 Actions to be taken

- Formation of voluntary organization of fisherwomen
- Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination
- Ensure the health, safety and well-being of fisherwomen and men workers
- Take measure to Improve the living condition of fisherfolk community
- Promote education, training and professional development for fisherwomen
- Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women
- Promote equity through community initiatives and public action
- Promote political representation of fishermen at various levels of democracy

Thank
You!

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