

# Sustainable Alternate Livelihood Avocations for Coastal Women in India

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## Introduction

Fisheries from the major source of employment, income and livelihood for most of the people inhabiting the coastal region. Women in fisheries are in general labelled as imperceptible workers as their contributions are not adequately apprehended and realized. Fishing in India is the main stay of men but women too play a major role in pre and post harvest activities. The fishers' population in the coastal villages of India is around 3.52 million out of which 49 per cent are women (CMFRI, Census, 2005). Fisherwomen actively involve themselves in different activities and thereby supplement their family income. It was observed that women even migrate to nearby places to gain employment. But, their level of migration is primarily hampered by the social system. More over, women have a propensity to take up inherent traditional activities rather than innovative activities. They also depend on their closer environment for their livelihood and most of the works they do are confined within their environment. Unlike men they cannot stretch out to far of places for gaining employment because they shoulder the family responsibilities and hence their economic oriented activity too is very limited.

## National Experience

Women also had a major contribution in marketing fresh fish and processing. Due to the growth of the industrial fleet and the expansion of domestic and foreign markets bigger entrepreneurs with capital have entered the sector as financiers, export agents, and they control the marketing chain for fish, especially higher value fish, as seen in India (Salagrama 2002). With the advent of net making technology, a substantial number of net making women were displaced. In Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu, India, the introduction of these machines reportedly led to the displacement of 20,000 women. (ICSF, 1997 and Shah (2002). In Kerala in activities such as net making and marketing, women are being marginalised due to increasing mechanization, commercialisation and centralization of fish landing (Krishna, 2000).

Bhatta (1998) made a study on the role of fisherwomen in fish marketing in the Mangalore city of Karnataka and indicated that development and commercialization of marine fisheries in Karnataka made the women to face competition from bulk buyers in the landing centre and have lost their traditional monopolistic

power over the retail trade. Fisherwomen in any work sector can be found occupying the position of a sub category or performing supportive roles. In all landing centres women engaged in fish drying collect small sized by catch. The by catches fetch very low price and earns a poor profit margin for women (Ashaletha *et.al*, 2000). The working condition for most of the fisherwomen is deplorable whether it is market or a peeling shed. As reported by Arpita (2000) complaints of arthritis, skin disorders back pain are common among the peelers.

Another recent innovation which has adversely affected and role and status of fisherwomen was the introduction of the auction system. In small traditional fishing villages in India, for example, women fish traders has been rendered redundant when auctions were introduced. Owing to non-profitability and non-viability of such fish trade business, most fisherwomen had to give up fish marketing, thereby further eroding their economic status within the family (Anbarasan, 1985).

Since fishing is commercial and prone to technological advancements it may still unfavourably influence the role of women and hence they should be provided with alternate livelihood options for their financial betterment. As in most traditional communities, the lives of fisher folk are governed by a set of socio-cultural values and norms which hinders their development. Factors like religious beliefs and rationalization, cultural norms, behavioral norms, myths, perceptions and moral values exert a strong influence on the fisher folk's social as well as economic lives. The political and social involvement of women, particularly in decision-making and leadership roles, has been very limited or even negligible. They should be brought out from these social clutches and be made to involve in income earning activities to improve their living standards.

## Areas of Livelihood

In general, rural women's work patterns are characterized by involvement in unchanged type of work and it is flexible. Change and flexibility are characterized by women taking on new roles in agricultural production, fisheries production, off-farm production and community production to ensure the family's access to food and household resources. Even though our country is enriched with natural resources the major hindrance for utilizing

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the resources are lack of proper planning, technical know how, financial support, interest of the end users, marketing opportunities and sustainability. If the available resources within their vicinity namely farm ponds, brackish water areas, productive lands, and raw materials are put into use for better production it may create a wide range of employment opportunities.

Fishery based location specific livelihood options for fisherwomen in major maritime states of India is elicited in the table below. These are some of the possible areas in which women could be employed, and gain additional employment and better income.

**Tamil Nadu** In Gulf of Manner region, women could be very well employed in sea weed collection, drying, sea weed culture, value added seaweed products such as algin, seaweed pickle, wafers, jams, seaweed manure preparation, ornamental shell collection, making ornamental artifacts with sea shell, raising of artificial coral reefs, and *Jatropha* cultivation. In Palk Bay region women have options to take up crab fattening, pearl culture specifically implantation of nuclear beads, sea cucumber culture, ornamental fish culture, shrimp farming, feed preparation, fish culture, shark processing and oil extraction (Species which are not banned), lobster fattening, palmirah craft, salt pans, mangrove raising, coir making.

**Kerala** Edible oyster culture, ornamental fish culture, mussel culture, fish culture, breeding and seed production of pearl spot, poly culture of sea bass and tilapia, shrimp seed collection, clam collection, shrimp hatcheries, shrimp feed preparation, value addition of fish, clam, mussels, prawn peeling, fish drying, ornamental/aquarium fish rearing, aquarium plants propagation, value addition from eichornia weed, house boats and floating restaurants fodder cultivation, vegetable cultivation in bunds of the farms, running fish cold storage shops, coir making.

**Karnataka** Shrimp farming, mussel culture, fish drying, vending, marketing, oyster and clam collection, prawn peeling and other fish processing industries, gutting and de-heading of fishes for surmi plants, net mending/making, raw material processing for fish meal plants, shell collection and handicraft making, shark fin and oil extraction (species which are not banned), fish curry masala making, running petty shops and restaurants, preparation of aqua feeds, *jatropha* cultivation for bio diesel.

**Andhra Pradesh**

Prawn culture, pearl culture specifically implantation of nuclear beads, fish seed collection, shrimp peeling and other fish processing plants, preparation of value addition, prawn feed preparation, fish selling and drying, auctioning, vending, smoking of fish, palmirah fruit jelly preparation, oil extraction from oil sardines, fish stall in beach areas with ready to eat fish preparations, labourers in salt pans, basket making, petty shops in harbour, palmirah craft.

**Orissa**

Crap breeding, nursery rearing, polyculture, breeding of cat fish, fresh water prawn culture in backyards, ornamental fish breeding and rearing, aquaculture of shrimp, crab collection, fattening and culture, paddy cum fish integrated farming, fresh water pearl culture, culture of spirulina and azolla, duck weed collection to use them as biofertiliser, *Spirulina* preparations namely papad, biscuits, noodles and capsules, golden grass trading and cultivation, feed preparation for fresh water fish, shell collection, shell meat extraction, shrimp peeling, dry fish processing, basket weaving, kitchen garden and backyard vegetable cultivation, as laborers in cashew plantation.

**West Bengal**

Fish drying, marketing, fish sorting, fish farming, collection of shrimp seed, cultivation of edible algae for fish feed, polyculture, crab farming, oyster culture, pisciculture, *Ilisha* fattening, feed making units, shrimp culture, value added fish products, pond fish culture integrated with livestock rearing and horticultural crops on the banks of the ponds, tourist attractive places like Sunderbans where there is scope for ecotourism women can run restaurants, petty shops, handicraft shops, location guides boat rides for tourists.

**Maharashtra**

Fishing of Kolim (mysid shrimp) can be done by women, processing of kolim, fish drying, marketing, by catch drying, value added products preparation, crap seed production, crap polyculture, ornamental fish culture, feed for carp, running fish booths, wending of dressed fish/fillets fish, dry fish preparation and marketing, processing of ready to cook fish products pickling, shell fish processing, running of seafood kitchen, production of fish feeds, production of fish silage/manure, chitin and chitosan manufacture, shark fin and shark

fin rays processing (Species which are not banned).

## Gujarat

Aquaculture of shrimp, lobster fattening, sea weed collection and culture, agar preparation and by products from seaweeds such as seaweed pickle, wafers, papads, jams, fish marketing, fish drying and fish processing, drying by catch for fish meal plant, prawn peeing, squid processing, *Jatropha* cultivation and value addition.

In general, the major areas other than fisheries in which women could be employed includes the following activities or enterprises.

- Agriculture, raising of crops, growing of ornamental plants, vegetable cultivation at farm steads, kitchen gardening, growing bund crops, ornamental plant nurseries, aromatic and medicinal plants growing, flower cultivation.
- Processing industries: Processing of cereals and pulses to make ready to cook or eat items
- Agro-based industries : Dairying, poultry, piggery, bee-keeping, sheep and goat rearing, sericulture, arboriculture.
- Fruits and vegetable preservation and utilization: Bottling and canning of fruits
- Handlooms weaving, hosiery and knitting
- Basket and rope making, coir making, cane and wicker work
- Pottery, clay toys, making of bricks and tiles, working in salt pans, making kitchenwares and utensils
- Fabric making, tailoring and ready-made garment making, thread manufacturing, doll making.
- Sports goods, stationary goods, paper making and book binding.
- Aerted water and soft drink.
- Others: Running petty shops, food stalls, and restaurants.

The areas with employment potential should be explored by conducting field-oriented studies in the fishing in villages and a documentary plan should be arrived at with the support of government, research institutes and other development organisations to be implemented in the village level. Besides for enhancing successful adoption of alternate livelihood options the marketing potential for the output of these programmes should also be ascertained for ensuring successful adoption of the livelihood options.

## Groups Approach for Sustainable Livelihood

Participation of women in the development process through Self-Help Group approach brings about desired changes in the quality of individual life and also social cohesion in the society. Self-Help Group (SHG) helps to

improve the morale of the individual and boost up their confidence and bring to the fore the hidden talents and skills of the individuals. Group efforts put forth tangible results. Community participation is a crucial factor for the expected outcome of the programmes. Self-Help Groups also contribute towards pooling of assets and achieving the specified goals.

The SGHs played a major role in the lives of the people and it is enhancing the standards of the people. Since it is functioning in the village itself women find it easy to participate effectively. It brings about the desired change in the quality of the individual and it is improving the women to come out from the social stigma. They break the values, norms and taboos to certain extent. It is witnessing cohesion in the society. Women have an opportunity to air their views. The formation of SHG being sub-contracted to a number of Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in their area of comparative advantage. In order to improve the incomes of fishing families, it was felt that income generating activities with financial support by the government, or foreign donor agencies was necessary. Further, projects should not be confined only to fishing-related activities, but also to other small scale non-fishery activities such as, coir making, ready-made garments, and mat making using the local raw materials. In order to strengthen the skills, both in management and technology, necessary training programmes should be conducted.

## Process of Providing Sustainable Livelihood

Women who have their own source of income-generating livelihood spend four hours or less everyday on their activities; most men claim to work more than eight hours or five to eight hours for four to six days in a week. The gender-disaggregated seasonal activities calendar of the community constructed in a workshop session shows that the women of Rizal practically have no rest the whole year round, doing all the household chores or doing various production activities as well.

One can never think that fishing can be the only source of living in a coastal community. It is quiet obvious that people in coastal areas could be employed in other sectors too. Until recently government programmes for women in the rural sector are more family development oriented geared mainly towards enhancing the domestic roles of women as wives and mothers (Jomo *et al.*, 1985). The trend of promoting income generating through alternate livelihood was of recent origin which has made the policy makers realize the significant contribution of women towards the economic circle of the household and thus the country. Women involved in fisheries lack agricultural land for cultivation and also they will have limited space for rearing dairy or poultry. Even though some are involved in poultry rearing it is of subsistence level which meets their domestic requirement. If any small scale industries are developed it should be within their reach because they

cannot go to far off places for work because they have to play a domestic role. Their need should be assessed. It should be built on the preferences, priorities and vast knowledge of local people and their communities. Technologies/skill-oriented options would lead for self-sustainability.

The avenues for employment are the basis for income generation. The major areas in which women are employed or can be employed are aquaculture, mariculture, agriculture, animal husbandry, handy craft making, tailoring, and in processing industries. The four main supporters in this employment generation process are research organizations, financial institutions, marketing facilities and societal support.

#### **(i) Financial Institutions**

Capital is the major requirement for any enterprise. In case of the fisher households, most of them are living in subsistence only and hence they require the capital for attempting any venture of alternate livelihood options. The required amount for capital formation needs to be provided to the women so as to begin an enterprise. Capital investment is the major problem faced by the rural women and hence banks should come forward to support them with finance at a lower rate of interest and subsidy should be provided. Small scale units need to be registered and groups should be formed. Once the technology is adopted by the women the product made out of the technology should be linked with the market and made sustainable. The concept of SHG's can be encouraged to finance the fisher women for taking up such alternate livelihood options.

#### **(ii) Marketing Facilities**

The success of any enterprise lies in its continuous and sustainable marketing. The market channel starts from the producer and ends in the consumer. It is the critical link between the producer and the end user. In any field the production depends upon its market. The persons involved in marketing should have market intelligence and better communication skill to persuade the consumer and sell the products. Women should be provided with market information on the various products produced by them. Suitable link with the retail outlets should be arranged so that there is a continuous demand for their products.

#### **(iii) Societal Support**

As explained already, the society plays a vital role in the empowerment of fisher women by encouraging them and lends support in running any enterprise selected under alternate livelihood options. In most of the traditional communities, the lives of fisher folk are governed by a set of socio-cultural values and norms. Societal support is the basis for rural women's progress. Such a support will motivate the women to come out of their shells and take up suitable livelihood options and thus make them empowered

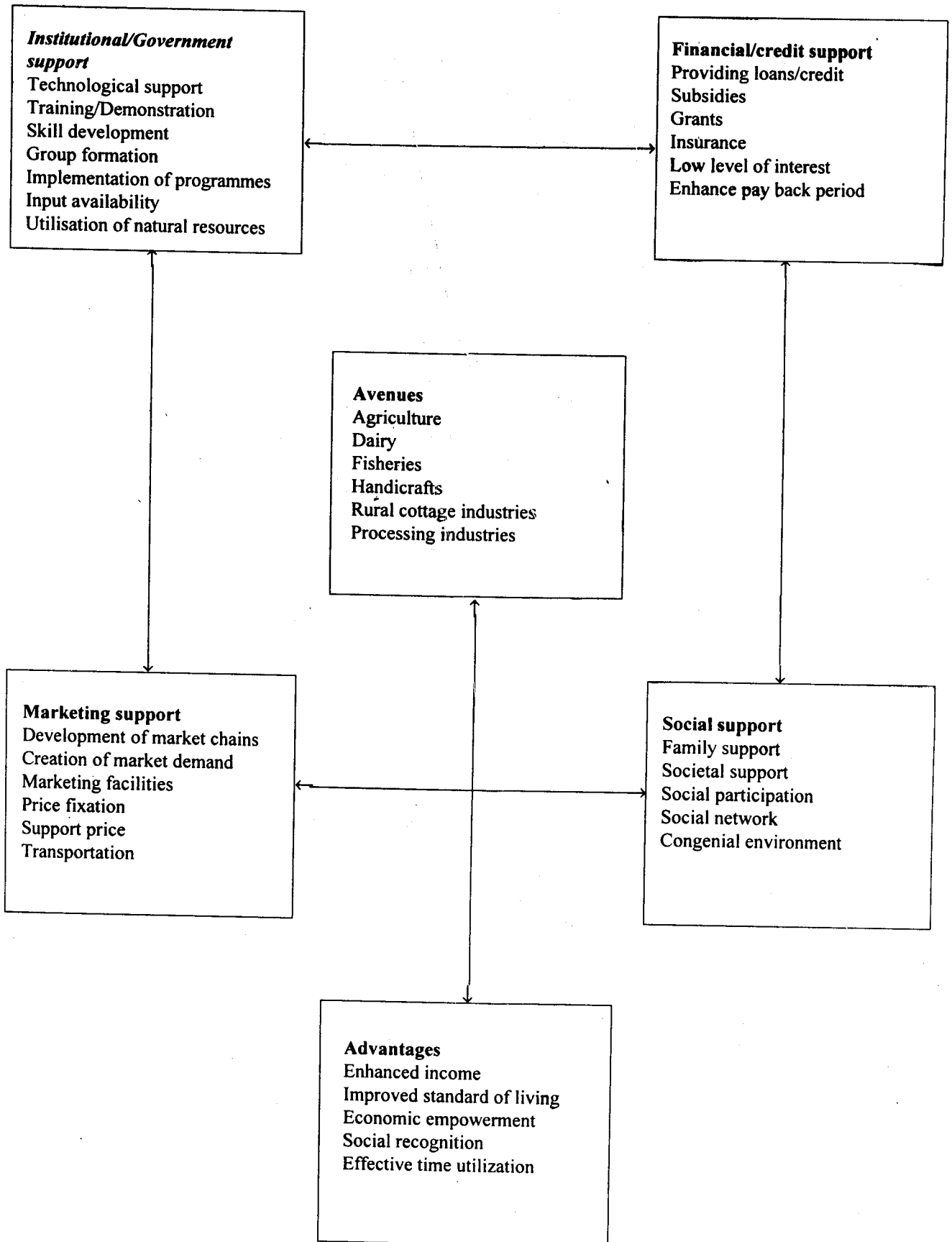
both economically and socially. Congenial social environment upgrades the women empowerment. Factors like religious beliefs and rationalization, cultural norms, behavioral norms, myths, perceptions and moral values exert a strong influence on the fisher folk's social as well as economic lives. The political and social involvement of women, particularly in decision-making and leadership roles, has to be enhanced.

#### **Strategies for Promoting Alternate Livelihood Options**

Even though there are ample scopes for the fisherwomen to enhance their income through supplementary activities, both at government level and at policy making level some strategies to be formulated which are listed below.

1. Women groups to be organized to set up small scale production enterprises with the credit support of financial institutions. These can either be a conventional business, done by the individual at household level like fish processing, preparation of value added products or new ventures related to export market. The preparation should use locally available raw materials, with low cost machines and simple technology. The products should be marketed through intermediaries, local shops, or cooperatives.
2. In each coastal district of the maritime states with the support of the local panchayat, women oriented developmental/income generating programmes with grants and subsidies required to be implemented. Women link workers have to be identified to act as local coordinators between the fisherwomen and other developmental departments.
3. Women cooperatives should be established at district level such as fish processing cooperatives, credit and marketing societies and producers' association and the produce developed by the fisherwomen group exclusively should be marketed.
4. Upgrading the educational background and skill of women by providing them rural learning institutions such as primary schooling, adult literacy classes, and vocational training in fisheries and agriculture innovations and it should be backed up with social/physical environment to adopt the technologies.
5. Existing SHGs have to be strengthened and the women should have a common forum to voice their candid views.
6. Women working as wage labourers should be brought under the organised sector and to be protected under the Labour law. They should be ensured with minimum wage legislation and social security measures.

### Alternate livelihood options Model



7. Women should be made aware about their legal rights and about the schemes and developmental measures offered by both government and non- government agencies.
8. Ownership of assets should be distributed emphasizing priority to gender because for any loan purpose the financial organisations require collateral security. So if the women have assets, by mortgaging their assets they can get loan from the banks and other money lending institutions to start or to scale up small enterprises.
9. Providing physical capital assets such as drying yards, peeling sheds and cold storage facilities in the coastal villages are important to pursue diversified livelihood strategy and also to enhance the income of the fisherwomen by reducing post harvest losses.
10. Care should be taken to safe guard the women dominated areas such as fish drying, marketing, prawn peeling and processing not be eroded away by technological innovations.
11. Women should be enlightened about the prevailing social norms, cultural taboos and conservative thinking which hinders their opportunities and access to economic resources and activities and they should be made known about the significance of education, income generation, and other betterment avocations for their livelihood security.
12. Social infrastructure such as roads and transport facilities to the markets should be developed to reduce the drudgery of women and also health management facilities such as health clinics, and sanitation installations to afford a hygienic and healthy milieu. Basic amenities such as water and electricity should be provided to reduce their work load because water and fuel collection consumes a major share of their time. Since women are subjected to take care of their children it is necessary to provide day care/play school in the villages where women can leave their children while they are coming out for working.

### Conclusion

Benefits the fisherwomen community gains through the employment are both direct and indirect. Women could perform most of the on farm and off farm activities with

modest training and societal support. To a certain extent their role should be supported by government institutions, NGOS and other developmental organizations by way of implementing women centric programmes. Earnings made by women are the factual assets of the family because they spend judiciously for the welfare of the family and hence women should have core access to income generation. Sustainable monetary income could be fuelled only by sound technologies and other interventions. Women should be made to have right of entry to promising areas of development. Since women have to take care of home/ domestic work the time for supplementary avocation should be planned in such a way that it should not hamper their normal chore of activities. By way of providing alternate employment the standard of living of the fishermen family will be upgraded due to additional income of the family and also leisure time could be spent effectively. Women gains social recognition and this would offer opportunities to overcome the societal hindrances. The ultimate aim of alternate livelihood avocations is to reduce poverty among coastal families by empowering the productive capacity of fisherwomen and to elevate the fishermen community from the poor domain.

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