

**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines**

Changes in the labour roles of women in the small-scale fishery in Kerala

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1. Introduction

This case study seeks to understand and highlight how the changes that have taken place in the fishery of Kerala State have also played out in the lives of women who are still very active in the small-scale fishery (SSF) particularly in the districts of Trivandrum, Kollam, and Kasargod.

Labour in small scale fishing was a shared or rather complementary activity between men and women along the whole fish value chain. While men did the actual fishing, women were active primarily in the pre and post harvest jobs. Nevertheless the nature of these women's jobs has seen major changes in the last two decades as the nature of the small scale fishery has also changed.

Initially women were engaged in pre-harvest activity either making or mending fishing nets. They lost this role when the machine-made nets came into the sector in the mid 1970s. In the post-harvest activity, they took the fish to the market to sell and also dried the surplus. While this was all work they did as self-employed/own account workers, in some places where fish landings were large, because of the larger shoals of pelagic fish harvested by the larger fishing craft, they also engaged in wage labour, drying or sorting the fish at the landing centres. Moreover, with the greater mechanisation of the boats and increasing size of the nets, the fish landings got larger and the fishery got more centralized. These changes altered the way women accessed the fish for sale. They had to travel further, compete with male merchants and pay ready cash for the products.

2. Some basic facts about the changing activity of women in the sector

There has been a growing impression that the number of women engaged in fish related activity as a means of livelihood – either being the only source of income in some families or providing a major share of the income in others -- has reduced over the years. The reality is different. Merely walking on the shores of these districts, one can notice large numbers of even young women involved in these activities.

According to the CMFRI census of 2011, the data reveals the following:

Table: 1 Data of the fishing villages in three districts

District	Traditional fishing families	Landing centres	Fishing villages
Trivandrum	32859	51	42
Kollam	12273	18	26
Kasargod	4500	19	16

**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines**

Total in Kerala	49632	88	84
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Although women in a few more coastal districts like Ernakulam and Mallapuram do engage in fish related activity, the numbers are not so large as in the three districts of Trivandrum, Kollam and Kasargod. Trivandrum district is the largest of the three districts with the most numerous landing centres. The large number of landing centres meant that fish was more easily accessible to local women who would carry it to the market. This southern part of Kerala has been home of the most skilled traditional fishers and a region where the craft is small and the gear most diverse. This also meant that there was fish landed throughout the year despite the seasonal fluctuations – if not in some landing areas then in others, and that women would then travel to them in order to procure fish for sale. Hence women from long also moved out of their own villages to access the fish in other villages of Trivandrum district.

It was different in Kasargod and north Kerala on the whole where the craft was larger and gear less diverse. But the woman's share to the resource in Kasargod was guarded by tradition where the social norms in the village safeguarded this access. But unlike in the south, the women only accessed fish in their own home village and did not move outside to other landing centres to access it. While women from all these districts exhibit great skills in marketing the fish, it is mainly the women of Trivandrum district who have tremendous ability to access it from far and near in fairly large quantities, and to compete aggressively with the male merchants.

Table 2: Women in fishing and allied occupations (2005 and 2010)

District	Fish Marketing		Net Making/repair		Processing		Peeling		Labour		Others*	
	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010
Trivm	8686	10362	3395	659	1365	2047	102	43	754	2140	1816	48
Quilon	986	1709	525	369	302	888	169	290	89	572	2367	18
Kasargo d	2459	3186	39	23	1	4	2	43	69	326	139	22
Total	13012	16176	4060	1183	3291	4769	7641	9457	912	3038	4322	88

* Includes persons engaged in auction, ice breaking, collection of bivalves, collection of other shells, culture of sea weed, collection of ornamental fish etc.

Source: Marine Fisheries Census Kerala 2005 and 2010

It is clear from the above Table 2 that except in net making the number of women engaged in fish related activity has increased. With the coming of the machine made nylon nets, this number has drastically reduced. In fact it was mainly women in Trivandrum and Kollam districts who were engaged in net making in large numbers. This was because of the smaller size and more

INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines

diverse assortment of nets that were traditionally used. The women in Kasargod assisted in the net making of the smaller nets used in the estuary. With the coming of the machine made nets, the variety of nets reduced and the size also got substantially larger. The material used for the nets also changed from cotton to nylon and then monofilament. The women continued to hand weave the nylon nets but were completely dislodged with the coming of the monofilament nets. Interestingly, the men easily concede that the nylon nets were the most durable and that the monofilament that is now used is also more often lost at sea, continuing with the ghost fishing that also has its impact on the stock.

The other job categories mentioned are the traditional tasks that women played although the tasks under the category 'labourer' are not spelt out. As the fish landings got larger, particularly in Trivandrum district, more labour was needed to off load the fish from the boats. In several villages this job was taken over by the stronger and younger women – some working as individuals and some in groups. Wading in and out of the water with basket loads on their heads became a normal site especially in the southern villages of Trivandrum District. The wages of these women was much more than women would earn doing any other wage work so close to their homes. But it was nowhere near what men 'headloaders' would get by law in Kerala hence making it more economic for the craft owners to hire women. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to get these women headloaders to organise and register in the Headload Workers Welfare Board so that they too could get the same wages. This is primarily because of the control of the men in these unions.

The other wage labour jobs that women do are fish sorting and even shelling of shrimp at the larger harbours in Kollam district in particular. Here women are paid on a piece rate basis. Although this job is considerably less strenuous, it means that women are squatted on their haunches for long periods, with their feet and hands constantly in cold water. These women until now have not been included into any workers organisations and hence receive no recognition or benefits as workers and again provide the cheap labour in this industry.

Drying of the pelagic fishes at the large fish curing units called '*chhaapas*' is another job that women do in the northern districts of Kerala. This, as earlier stated is also because the craft was traditionally larger and fish landed in greater bulk. A variety of curing methods were thus developed, from sun drying to salting and fermenting and drying. These *chhaapas* are owned by men merchants who hire the women labour to do the work.

It is interesting to see that the intensity of activity in fishing villages has also changed in accordance with the changes in craft and gear. Some villages that were 'dead' have revived with the coming of the large ring seine or with the arrival of insulated vans from other distant fish landing centers from other states arriving with fish for sale. On the other hand villages which were once very active have grown lifeless as the fishing activity has decreased or where there were no enterprising local fishers who wished to venture into investing in the new and larger fishing units. These changes have also impacted on the work of women in these areas. Either they make purchases from the wholesale merchants bringing fish from afar and not the fishermen of their own village as is mostly the case in Kollam and Kasargod, or they are pressured into making trips to distant shores and fish landing centres just to survive as the daring women of Trivandrum district do.

INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines

Another new sight that developed in the villages of south of Trivandrum over the last 10 years is the large number of women walking around with account and receipt books. These are the clerks of the auction agents. Being more educated, these women are paid a monthly wage to maintain accounts. They work mainly in the mornings when the fish comes in. Some of them also need to chase creditors to get back their cash during the day. Consequently one can also witness squabbles between women when money is not paid back or over differences in calculations.

Overall, one tends to conclude that women in fish vending and as labourers has not diminished and that young women too are entering the fish trade and related activities. In fact young married women who are educated and also have tried their hands at other occupations like tailoring, giving tuitions to children, small scale food processing and petty businesses, have finally dumped all that and found that fish vending is more lucrative although it is far more taxing. It is really the need for more cash in the families to meet daily needs which has forced them into this.

The category in the Table referred to as “others” include a variety of different kinds of work that women do like the women fish pickers – *thappukar*, shell gathers, – in Kollam district. These women work in the estuaries and back waters ingeniously picking fish with their toes and fingers. They also collect mussels and some even set traps for crabs. But these are just a few in numbers.

3. Women’s access to fish for sale.

In the small-scale fishing communities (with the exception of the Muslim communities) women have traditionally taken fish landed at their shores for sale to retail markets. It was either house to house vending or taking space at street corners or regular markets to retail directly to rural and urban consumers. They bought on credit and paid back after sale. As mentioned earlier, there were also more daring women who travelled to other shores and bought fish in bulk and retailed it at markets nearer home. Some of them even sold at wholesale markets. These women merchants are fewer in number though they are still around. Their success depended on their physical, financial and political acumen. The physical side related to having the ability to rise early, complete the house chores and travel to distant markets – sometimes in the wee hours of the morning. The financial side related to having the money or credibility to purchase on credit and the confidence of taking the risk to dispose of the catch in the retail and wholesale markets. The political acumen had to do with their ability to counter or cope with the male dominance of the workplace. All wholesale markets, and now all public markets, are thoroughly male dominated and vulgarly so. In the earlier decades the male merchants were also there by tradition and they condescendingly accepted the women who found their way to these markets. But gradually this arena is filled with a machismo of new entrants who have made money in other areas and invested in this enterprise or who just have the political clout to call the shots.

Since the 1980s, several women fish vendors left their home shores to procure fish for sale from other shores. In Trivandrum district for instance, the majority of them went to harbours at Vizhinjam in Trivandrum or Neendakara in Kollam. After the fisher women’s struggle led by the Coastal Women’s Front in late 1970s, the Fishermen’s Welfare Corporation also provided, from 1982, buses for women from Vizhinjam harbor to travel a few markets in the city in Trivandrum city. They also transported women from the city villages in Trivandrum to go to Neendakara

INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines

harbor in Kollam district every day to procure fish to be sold back in Trivandrum. Although the transport to Neendakara still continues, the transport of women from the local shores to the market is at best erratic. This meant that the majority of women fish vendors procured fish from the fishers who made daily fishing trips ensuring that the fish was largely fresh.

In Kollam, initially it was only those women who dried fish who went to the Neendakara harbor to buy the fish discards for drying. But later and that was towards the end of the 1990s, when loans were made available to women to purchase vehicles and the fishing at the village landing centres reduced, women in Kollam also travelled to the Neendakara harbor to purchase fish mainly for direct sale but a couple of them do buy in bulk as well. Since it was not the practice of women in Kasargod to move out of their villages to procure fish, this category of woman vendor did not exist there.

By the 1990s, as fish landings from the mechanized sector increased and access to good fish for women at the home villages decreased in the traditional sector, an increasing number of women had to procure fish from the wholesale markets.

In Trivandrum women went to the large whole sale markets like Pangode, Aranmula and Attingal. The fish being sold came from distant harbours, largely from the western coastal harbors in Calicut, Kannur Mangalore and even from Taminadu. This fish was iced, but caught by the small trawlers involved in single day fishing.

Many middle-class customers in Trivandrum associate sand on the fish as a sign that it is straight from the nearby beaches and hence fresh. In order to 'play to their tune', the women vendors began to sprinkle sea sand on the iced fish they bought in the wholesale market to give the impression that the fish was fresh and from the shore. Since consumers continue to make purchasing choices demanding fresh fish, they in turn encouraged women to camouflage the quality by the sprinkling of unhygienic sand, little understanding that this fish is thus more contaminated.

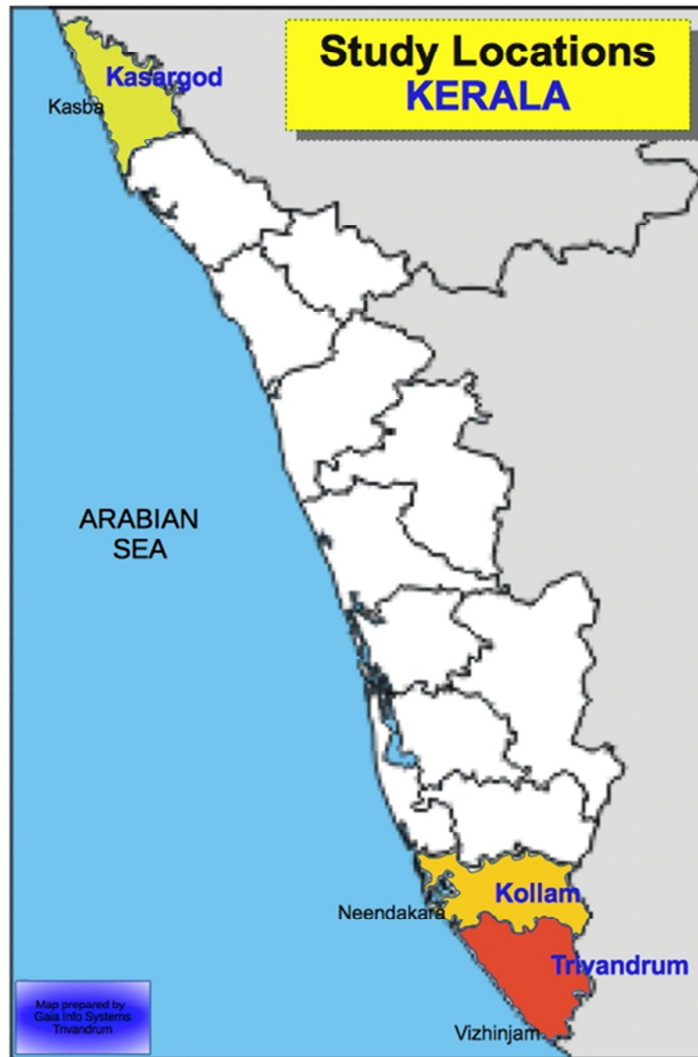
By 2005 ice crated and frozen fish from harbours in Cochin, Mangalore and Vishakhapatnam, caught by larger multi day fishing vessels became a norm in the whole sale markets of Trivandrum, Kollam and Kasargod. Women had to use devious means to camouflage this fact and began to use ice to spruce up decaying fish, salt and even ammonia to defreeze the frozen hard fish before sale. Since fish landings at the local sea shores became scarce, adventurous merchants also started to bring insulated vans from these distant harbours to the village beaches in Trivandrum. This trend became visible by 2008. Some villages like Anjengo and Puthiathura, in Trivandrum district opposed this practice as it affected the price of fresh fish on the shore. So these merchants found other areas for off-loading this fish. They started unauthorised whole sale markets on the Pallam beach; and at the ISRO and Aralmooda junctions. In Pallam, this practice was even conducted in agreement with the local Church. In the process what was a poor parish church, with the coming of the merchants bringing fish in insulated vans, has become one like its richer neighbours. This new fish marketing chain has kept many women vendors in business and given consumers access to fish at cheaper prices. However, only the vendors are aware of the fact that the fish they sell is of poor quality.

INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines

In more recent times, with the initiatives of the State to provide loans to women vendors, some women vendors have availed loans from the Matsyafed or the Kudumbashree to purchase trucks of their own or in small groups, to make bulk purchases in large landing centres. Others have bought small cold storage units (freezers) to preserve the fish from their local beaches and to make it available at their vending sites and continue their business – like the women street vendors in Kesavadasapuram in Trivandrum. These few vendors are proud to sell ‘fresh fish’ and have a regular stream of buyers who are also willing to pay the higher price that these vendors demand.

In Kasba, a village in Kasargod district, the situation is slightly different. Here, as mentioned earlier, the women did not have the tradition of going to other shores to access fish as there were always good landings in the village and the market was just 3-4 kilometers away. However, over the last 6-7 years the fish catches have gradually dwindled and the market is flooded with iced fish from the harbors of Beypore and Mangalore. Most of the women are now forced to purchase iced fish from the male merchants in the whole sale market.

**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines**



**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines**

Box 1: Untiring women vendors

Kamla (name changed) from Poonthura village, is a retail woman vendor handling large volumes of fish. Kamla travels to distant Kanyakumari and even Thuthukudy to access large fish in considerable quantities. She sometimes purchases at two different landing centres and then returns to Trivandrum. She travels on one mini lorry with her goods while another may follow her driven by a man she trusts. She buys with cash and on credit depending on which landing centre. Her purchases vary from between Rs. 50-80000 depending on the quality of fish she purchases. Kamla is enterprising. She occupies a larger selling space in the Connemara market in Trivandrum. She has a variety of fish to sell – small and big, and she sells for longer hours. The variety of products attracts more customers but she incurs the wrath of the other vendors whom she deprives of space. She is able to sell her iced fish cheaper thereby undercutting the women sellers who bring fresh from the village in the afternoons.

Bridgit (name changed) on the other hand, is a regular vendor who travels on the Matsyafed fish-bus to go from Veli to Neendakara on a daily basis to purchase fish from the harbor. She leaves home at 5.30 am and gets to her vending site in Kumarapuram by 10.30 am with a large container of what she calls ‘fresh fish’! She is able to dispose the lot by 1 pm and returns home. She has a monthly pass for the bus. She pays Rs 650 for the monthly pass which assures her of 15 trips to and fro. Bridgit started vending at the age of 10 when she accompanied her mother to the market walking several miles a day. She is now 55 years of age.

4. Purchasing fish at the whole sale market.

Purchasing fish at the whole sale markets in Trivandrum (where sales commence as early as 4 am) is an ordeal for women. In Kasargod, this commences around 6 am. This space is dominated by men merchants and male head loaders. When fish is fresh, the auctions are generally fair. But when fish is iced and comes in crates the system is not transparent. Women complain that in some markets the agents announce the weight of each crate before the auction. No weighing of the crates is done. But the weight declared is always more than the fish in the crate and hence they make big losses. On the other hand, the crates are packed in such a way that the upper layer exhibits good and large fish but below it are the decayed and very small fish. In other cases, it is the ice at the bottom that adds to the weight and finally the women lose both on account of the false weight and the bad quality of fish.

The increase of iced and frozen fish at the wholesale markets has encouraged the fish merchants to engage more men retail sellers --both in the markets and by using scooters to sell the fish in more distant places. Over the last 10 years, the number of male fish vendors has increased phenomenally making ‘cheap’ fish available at one’s doorstep all over the districts early in the morning. What better service to the housewife who not only has to minimise costs on shrinking budgets but has also to pack the family meal before getting ready for work herself! The women on the contrary still hire vehicles to reach the markets and many of them still walk with the loads on their heads.

This proliferation of men makes the market place more aggressive and competitive for women. However, additionally, the fact that the majority of these men are contracted by the bigger fish

INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines

merchants who also bid to collect the market taxes puts the women at a massive disadvantage in Trivandrum district because the merchant extracts a tax from the women, but not from the men who are their employees. Despite protests by the SEWA women's union, the municipal authorities, that own the markets, plead helpless. Merchants are also part of a mafia with henchmen and also unleash violence. They also fund the trade union functionaries and so have considerable political clout.

In Kollam there is what is called a 'commission kada (shop)'. Here a fish merchant sells wholesale iced fish to women and also to men in areas where women would normally not have easy access to the fish. There is no auction as he fixes the price. This is the flipside, as such arrangements have also facilitated access of women to fish.

5. Vending spaces, markets

While there are still some areas in which women engage in door to door vending mainly in Trivandrum and Kollam districts, the majority of women sit in retail market spaces of different kinds.

At street markets small groups of women have established their hegemony retailing for three to four hours a day – in the morning or in the evening. These are all informal markets which are also constantly under threat of eviction from the municipal authorities or the traffic police. But with the passage of the Street Vendors Act of 2014, street vendors are also guaranteed rights to livelihood and hence they have tools to defend themselves although it is a constant struggle. Nevertheless, sitting out in the sun or even the rain, is indeed taxing. They squat on their haunches or on small stools. Not to mention the fact that women have no way to meet their personal needs during a long working day. At markets where they sell at the late evening hours, they sit with kerosene lamps having to inhale the toxic fumes and then find their way home in the night before disposing the remaining fish at cheap prices.

In the more formal market places, mainly owned by the local administration, there are a variety of scenarios. With city modernization plans, several of the municipal markets have been re-modeled and spruced up. But all of them have their drawbacks. The drainage may not work; the heights of the display counters are incorrect; the tiled floors are slippery; there is lack of running water or toilets; the poor waste disposal systems are poor. But the most worrisome factor is the male domination in all the districts; and the unjust tax collecting systems and the male head load unions in Trivandrum district. It has never occurred to town planners that they could discuss with the actual users about their needs.

Some of these improved markets like the Chamakkada market, which is the largest in Kollam, used to house over 100 fish vendors. Today it has only around 28 vendors. The 16 women who continue to vend there say the consumers now buy their fish from the male merchants who sell from door to door on their scooters. One of the vendors who remains is from the coastal village of Pallithotam in Kollam. She sells fish on a large scale. She owns her own pick up van and since she was able to obtain this with a loan from the bank, she now procures fish from the neighbouring landing centre of Vaadi and also sometimes from Neendakara. She is an INTUC leader in the market. She prides herself saying she sells fresh fish and hence her customers come

INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines

to her regularly. But even she sometimes goes to the Kurisummodu street market near the railway station to sell fish there.

In this market the toilet facilities have remained closed since the time it was reconstructed and there is no electricity connection or waste disposal system. These are all reasons for women to remain away with the result that the man who leases out the market has recently begun to let other vendors use the space.

Nevertheless, some of these renewed markets do function well because of the interest taken by the women who work collectively. The Sreekaryam market in Trivandrum is a good example. On the other hand, the positive efforts made by the Corporation of Trivandrum to renew the fish market in Palayam have been stalled. This is due to the disagreement of the women's union leaders despite the Corporation making efforts to negotiate.

There are also instances when the women of the SEWA union collectively pressured the authorities to renew the markets such as Kumarichanda in Trivandrum district. But after the renewal took place, the male fish vendors occupied the space and kept the women out. When men who bid for the market space are also the large fish merchants, they give their male vendors all the priorities and keep the women out.

There still remain a number of formal markets that are in very shabby and unhygienic conditions. Some of these structured markets are located on privately owned lands and can be categorized as private markets where the owner decides the conditions. However, the majority are on lands that belong to the government where the users can also have their say.

No market vending committees have been set up in order to regulate such issues as the Corporation and municipalities prefer to leave these subjects ambiguous thereby serving the interests of the local party heavy weights. The Municipal Acts do not specify any of these issues -- particularly regarding market taxes.

In Kasargod women have accessed fish only from the landings in their villages mainly on credit. But as the local fish catches have been dwindling, they are at a great loss as they too are now at the mercy of the merchants who bring iced fish to the market. Their major complaint is that they are forced to purchase crates of fish which are sold as per the quantity and the variety of fish each crate contains. But the crates are neither opened nor weighed in front of them. They allege that they are cheated in this way and besides having less cash in hand they also have to bear heavy losses.

6. Market taxes and other charges

There are no licenses or taxes collected from women who vend fish informally along the streets. But the formal markets tax the vendors. Despite the fact that rates are stipulated by the authorities in the publically owned markets, the tax collection is also contracted to the highest bidder who automatically becomes the authority of the market and is often the main wholesale fish merchant as well. Market taxes are paid on a daily basis and are supposed to be based on the quantity of fish sold. For women who carry a basket load of fish into the market, they were actually supposed to be exempt of market taxes. This was the demand and a result of the women

INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines

vendors organizing in the 1980s. However, this does not hold good everywhere today. Where as in Kollam there are fixed taxes from between Rs. 70 to 140 depending on the quantum of fish brought for sale, in Kasargod the women pay a daily tax of Rs.10-30 a day, there are a variety of rules that have been established by the tax collectors in Trivandrum District, and they vary from market to market. No local bodies have any particular norms by which taxes are levied. Details of the Trivandrum fish market tax scenario gives a picture of the extortion experienced by the women fish vendors.

In the Pettah market there are 24 retail vendors in the morning and 19 in the evening. The majority of the evening vendors do not sit inside the market. 'Kadakkasu' -- the tax for sitting inside the market -- is Rs. 60. If the vendor uses a plank to display her fish she has to pay Rs. 15 extra. But if she also uses an empty box on which she places the display plank she has to pay Rs.30. If she uses a stool to sit on she again has to pay a daily tax of Rs. 30. Besides this she has to pay loading and unloading charges of Rs.60 for an aluminium vessel of fish to the head load association. This is for a mere distance of maximum 50 meters. For a small- scale fish vendor who comes with two aluminium vessel of fish to the market, she has to spend around Rs. 250 a day as tax and loading and unloading charges per day. This does not include her transport to the market.

In Sreekaryam market the only tax which is levied in the market is the ' kadakkasu' which is Rs. 50 for morning women vendors for an aluminium vessel of fish. For 2 aluminium vessels, it is Rs.70, for three aluminium vessels it is Rs. 90. If their sales continue after 2.00 pm they have to pay an extra amount of Rs. 20. A man vendor with 4-5 crates of fish, pays only Rs.100. The women coming without sand have to pay only Rs. 40. As stated earlier, women carry sand with them to the markets to camouflage the quality of the iced fish they sell so that the customer is tricked to think it is fresh from the sea shore. The sand is then discarded in the market after sale and accumulates, much to the annoyance of the person who has bid for the tax collection and the job of maintaining the market.

In Neyyantinkara market, 'kadakkasu' for each aluminium vessel is a minimum Rs.150 and this varies according to the size of the vessel and quantity of the fish. For a big aluminium vessel the tax levied is Rs.250. Whereas, the men who use plastic crates for the fish pay only Rs.30 per crate. Women pay an added Rs. 10 for the display plank. Besides this a daily collection of Rs. 5 is made by the meat vendor as 'pallikkasu' (saying it is a contribution towards the mosque). To wash their vessels, at the end of the sales, women buy water at a cost of Rs. 10 per aluminium vessel of water. The 'kadakkasu', 'pallikkasu' and water cost is collected by different men. Vendors also have to pay a sum of Rs. 10 each per day for the cleaning of the market. A toilet facility is available in the market for which they also pay Rs. 5 for use each time.

In Palayam market there are also three different costs. 'Palakappirivu', is what the vendors pay for the usage of small plank used for the display of fish. For two display planks it is Rs. 30 per day. They use between two to four planks. For cutting purposes inside the shelter in the market they have to pay the 'palakappirivu' of Rs.10 per table.'Irippidappirivu', is for the sitting stool during sales which is Rs. 10 and 'kadakkaasu' for the space provided for them in the market for each basket of fish which is Rs. 10. All women have to pay the three charges on a daily basis.

**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines**

In the terms for the market contractor it is specifically mentioned that the collection of fees inside the market should be according to the rate fixed by the Corporation. However, the guidelines do not mention the allowable tax amount. The head load charge stipulated is for Rs.5.00. But in the threatening situation inside the market, the women fish vendors are compelled to pay whatever is demanded. The vegetable vendors in the market have to pay a tax of only Rs. 20 per day. Fish vendors are therefore discriminated against even in the market.

It is clear from the cases mentioned that the women fish vendors are at the mercy of the extortionist males and there seems to be no way to change this as there is also no Municipal or Corporation Act that determines these issues.

7. Women in the dry fish sector

All over the state, women have been drying fish either on their own or as labour for others. The latter has been the case where the big shore seines or ring seines have operated catching pelagic like sardines and anchovies in central and north Kerala.

Although women had several forms of drying fish earlier, they do not anymore undertake drying on a large scale. Only women who are too old to vend in the markets purchase fish for drying. Those vendors who come home with unsold fish are also forced to dry it.

The system of the chaapas – fish curing sheds -- in north Kerala have been very famous. Here big merchants bought in bulk on the shore and engaged women to dry the fish in a variety of ways and then sold it in bulk. The expansive shores of Tanur and Ponnani in Malapuram district, Beypore in Kozhikode and a few other places have been famous for their chaapas. The region was dominated by a shoaling pelagic fishery. Fishing crafts were therefore always large and the landing were in large quantities. Consequently, salt drying and fermenting of fish was a tradition in these areas. Quite a few hundred women were involved in this work.

In Tanur, in Mallapuram District, it is said that earning up to Rs.300 a day with extra for tea, was the norm till 2013. But subsequently fish landings have fallen so drastically that they have nothing to dry and the chaapas are all closed except for a couple. The loss of employment of women has been considerable.

Interestingly, it is just two years since a harbour is being constructed in Tanur where the traditional craft have a more secure landing area. But the catches have drastically diminished. Moreover, with the erosion caused by the construction of the breakwater groins, the expansive beach that was typical of Tanur no longer exists. For the most part of the shore there is now a sea wall and the habitation is also threatened. So while there is less fish to cure and dry on a regular basis, when the big landings do occasionally arrive, the drying space is no longer available and the merchants are unable to procure the fish. It is then transported to the fish meal plants towards Mangalore at fairly low prices.

8. Other wage work

A substantial number of women sort and shell shrimp at harbours. They squat with their feet in water and sorting with their bare hands, the shrimp that is off loaded with ice from the trawlers.

INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines

They are paid on a piece rate basis and have work only when there are landings. A large number of women also work in peeling sheds in the Aroor and Cochin areas. While several of these sheds may be registered as establishments, the majority are unregistered and operate in compounds of house owners who buy the shrimp from the harbours and supply the shelled shrimp to the larger sheds. Here again all wages are on piece rate. When landings of shrimp are large women work 16-20 hours a day in an effort to make a little extra earning.

9. Institutional arrangements to facilitate women's work in the fisheries.

Kerala government prides itself of large support being provided to rural and poor women towards empowerment and entrepreneurship. The 33 percent reservation for women in local government bodies, which is consciously implemented in Kerala, also means that a large number of women can participate in decision making. This has certainly meant that women have been included in the spread of the monetized economy as well as being included at decision making levels where they can raise their voices and become visible at policy making levels.

Kudumbashree, the net work of women self help groups and the Matsyafed are institutions that have specially reached out extensively to women providing them inputs to organize enterprise and take their business forward by providing both interest free and small interest loans.

There are a total of 133 all-women cooperatives registered in Matsyafed. The organization gives women loans both interest free and at low interest. But once the loan is given, the only job of the organisation is to see that the repayment is ensured. There is no hand holding process to assist the women to actually increase her assets or her capabilities in financial management or develop mechanisms to facilitate her access to fish. This has increased women's indebtedness as they borrow even from 5-6 private lending institutions to pay back one loan after another in order to manage their work and lives. In cases where women's groups bought their own transport vehicles as in Trivandrum district, with such multiple loans, they were either cheated by the men who drove the vehicles, or abandoned by some members of the group who could not work in the group and repay accordingly, with the result that the one or two enterprising women in the group were left with the entire burden to repay the loan. All these institutional loans are given as group loans. Group guarantees are safe for the lending bank, which also withholds the subsidy allocated by the government till the last repayment. Women have not been helped to function as a group and manage the finances in sustainable ways.

No infrastructure such as storage for fish at the landing centres or in fish markets has been provided. Such facilities would help women purchase in bulk and not have to engage in distress sales. Facilities for women to rest at the harbours are also not provided.

More recently, the Kerala State Coastal Area Development Corporation was set up in 2009. The "Fresh fish to All" project was launched in 2010. With a budget of Rs. 390 lakhs, the aim of the project was the supply of insulated trucks and three-wheelers with insulated boxes and two wheelers with an insulated box to fish vendors. This budget had a contribution from Central Government of Rs. 270 lakhs and a state contribution of Rs. 30 lakhs. It expected a beneficiary contribution of Rs. 90 lakhs.

**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines**

According to reports of the KSCADC – 2014, the trucks are given only to men vendors who created cooperative societies to avail of these facilities. Auto rickshaws were supplied to 13 women's groups and 4 men's groups. The group leader gets the auto rickshaw in this scheme. Two-wheelers were supplied to 6 women beneficiaries and 124 men under this scheme.

The KSCADC project for fish market construction project is under progress. So far it has launched markets spread over 11 places in Kerala in the first phase. In the second phase another 30 market projects are in progress. KSCADC also proposes another project for value added fish products where women can be trained. But this project is yet to be launched.

For dry fish production KSCADC has launched an open market 'DRISH Kerala' a project to produce branded dry fish. It has got a facility to dry fish in a UV protected cabinet drier with high velocity hot air derived from solar air heating panels. The centre is at Kollam District of Kerala. The SHGs of both men and women can come and dry their fish in this institution. A daily rent for the processing is levied.

Again, while money is made available and the plans for the commercialisation of fish products is commendable, there is no provision made for technical and managerial support to see that the beneficiaries are the actual fish workers with emphasis being given to support women.

10. Social protection for women workers.

Providing a measure of social protection was the first response of the government to the fishworkers' struggle in the early 1980s. As women participated in large numbers in these struggles the fact that they too are fishworkers was established. Hence, they too would benefit from the social security measures provided by government. But this was not as easily understood by the authorities who executed the schemes. It took a struggle again before women fish vendors were registered separately which now gives them rights to the benefit and also to pensions when they grow older. Where women are organized and aware, they have been able to benefit from the welfare measures put in place by the Fishermen's Welfare Fund Board. They have access to the famine cum relief fund on payment of their contributions and also to scholarships for the education of their children. Nevertheless, the disbursements of welfare payments are not regular and do not come at the time of need. Women are not compensated for accidents as the fishermen are. There has been extensive distribution of small ice boxes. However these are too small in capacity for women who would need to store fish fresh. The larger ones would be too heavy for women to carry.

11. Conclusion

The role of women in small scale fisheries is important because women play the major role in sustaining the family and community. They bring home all the money that they earn from the sale of fish. They keep the home fires burning, exhibiting great resilience and adapt to changing situations. It is they who also focus on the education of the children and nurture of the family at great cost to their health and well being. Hence, retaining their spaces in the fishery is of utmost importance. Moreover, there is a clear indication that the number of women in fish related activity is not decreasing on the whole.

INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines

Before the year 2000 the labour of women was also the main factor in reaching fresh fish to the consumer sustaining the nutrition and health standards of the local community and the consumers at large. This logic of a labour intensive distribution system of a commodity that has a very short shelf life is diametrically opposed to the logic of the large fishing operations. The investments in the larger fishing operations result in greater centralization of the fishery and pressure on the resource resulting in depletion. Larger landings call for extensive distribution networks and the need for cold chains that are equally costly and dependent on non-renewable energy. Although the fish supplied in this mode to the consumer may be cheaper, large quantities of undersized fish are also turned into fish meal thus depriving poorer consumers of cheap protein. If sustaining the fish resource and employment generation is to be a focus of the small scale fishery, and if cutting down on non-renewable energy use is required to cut down greenhouse gases, then the logic of the smaller operations, in multiple landing centres with women playing a major role in the distribution chain is the ideal option.

Women have found ingenious ways to survive, but in doing so they have also been exploited by the men who have entered this arena in search of jobs. The vulgarity of the market place results from the fact that there is no real implementation of norms to regulate such public spaces. The result is that private individuals who own the land on which the market is built or monied merchants cum tax collectors always call the shots to the disadvantage of the women.

The State has also been insensitive to these issues. Much money has been invested in improving infrastructure in markets but these improvements have not always been practical and have not managed to produce more than a couple of really hygienic and properly planned markets in the state. Much money has also been invested as subsidies and loans to assist women enhance their earnings in fish related activity but without providing the hand holding required to enhance the managerial skills and capacity of women. Hence fish marketing continues to remain an unhygienic reality where the vociferous men merchants and head loaders dominate. Unfortunately, the initial proposal of the Matsyafed to create the Kerala Fish Marketing Regulation Act, never saw the light of day because of the lack of political will.

That women in fisheries are not taken seriously and that the state is unwilling to genuinely sustain the small scale fishery is a sad reality.

12. Recommendations

While it is probably impossible to turn the clock back, it is certainly possible to sustain the existing spaces of women in fish related activity. This has to be an approach of involving men and women jointly in a process of fisheries management. In the process it will be possible to consciously build on a model towards sustainability both of the fishery resources and the livelihoods of the coastal communities. With the extensive infrastructure that is invested in the Matsyafed, efforts should be made to engage constructively with the SSF assisting the communities to understand the economic logic of smaller and more efficient fishing operations which in the long run will provide them both with livelihood and safe communities. Fisheries management measures should be put in place with active participation both of men and women in the community. This will certainly have to be backed by short term inputs from the state in

**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines**

terms of either wages or food rations for the losses of working effort that management will require until local fisheries revive.

1. Assist women to access better quality fish directly from the local harbours either by providing them transport facilities to the harbours and markets or organizing for special trucks to bring them good quality fish in whole sale markets.
2. Assist them to buy in bulk but without being cheated on weights by the male merchants Helping them to develop and sustain a business is a service that should be rendered.
3. Create spaces in formal markets for women who buy directly from the local shores on a daily basis so that customers are also educated about fish quality and are willing to pay the price for better quality fish.
4. Urgent steps should be taken to stop the exploitation of local tax collectors
5. Immediate steps should also be taken to see that women have decent spaces to vend in markets and they should get priority over the salesmen of the bigger merchants
6. Provide storage space for women in markets
7. Toilet and water facilities should also be provided in markets
8. Eventually develop a Fish Marketing Regulation Act



Shaktilungara where over 100 women vend fish - disputed land

**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines**



Shaktikulangara

**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines**



Ramankulangara fish market constructed for fish vendors(not is use)



Tank made for waste water disposal but using as a waste dumping place.

**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines**



The male vendors in the market



**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines**

The rush time in the market



Kazhakoottam

**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines**



Kazhakootam

**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines**



Kazhakootam

**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)
2015-16, DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS
INDIA STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SSF Guidelines**



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