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Cover picture: Woman fish processor using traditional smoking kiln in Andhra Pradesh

INDIA

- A workshop on "Credit Sources for Marine Fisherfolk" is to be held in Hyderabad and Bhubaneswar during January-February 1996. It will be sponsored by the Directorates of Fisheries of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, the ODA Post-Harvest Fisheries Project (PHFP), the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and Interventions (I) Limited, Bangalore. Participants will include fisherfolk, fish traders, financing agencies, NGOs who work with fishing communities, and representatives of state Governments.
- Mr. G.S.R.C.V. Prasada Rao, Director of Fisheries, Andhra Pradesh, was a welcome visitor to the ODA-PHFP regional office at Kakinada in mid-October 1995, when he discussed in detail the post-harvest-related needs of fisherfolk communities in Andhra Pradesh. Mr. Rao expressed the hope that the useful collaboration between the state Fisheries Department and PHFP would be further strengthened in the future.
- In East Godavari district, women fish processors are receiving ODA-PHFP designed smoking bins, while fishermen operating medium-sized navas are getting insulated fish boxes designed by ODA-PHFP. The Directorate of Fisheries, Andhra Pradesh, is helping in the distribution of these products to their intended target groups in coordination with two agencies — the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) and the Backward Communities Development Board.
- Representatives of Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) from East Godavari district are to visit NGO fisherwomen organizations in Orissa under the sponsorship of DRDA. The idea is to understand issues related to group formation and motivation for community development in the context of post-harvest fishing requirements.
- ODA-PHFP will provide technical assistance to the Directorate of Fisheries, Andhra Pradesh, to conduct a training programme on post-harvest technology for departmental Fisheries Extension Officers and staff of selected NGOs during January 1996.
- ODA-PHFP plans to extend its activities to the state of West Bengal. To this end, a team visited West Bengal in December 1995 and held discussions with officials of the Fisheries Directorate, other concerned departments/public-sector undertakings, funding agencies, NGOs working with fisherfolk communities, and the fisherfolk themselves. The views and needs expressed during the discussions are being studied in order to formulate activities in 1996.
- The Department of Industrial Fisheries, Cochin University of Science and Technology, organized in December 1995 a three-day national symposium at Cochin on "Technological Advancement in Fisheries and Their Impact on Rural Development". The largely attended symposium was co-sponsored by government, public-sector, autonomous and funding organizations. Some 180 papers covering various aspects of fisheries were presented.
- ODA-PHFP has undertaken field trials of insulated ice boxes for use on board by kattumaram fishermen for high-value catches in Orissa (Chandrabhaga-Konark), Tamil Nadu (Manapad) and Andhra Pradesh (Uppada). The results of the trials — in particular, the views and requirements of the fisherfolk—will be studied for formulating necessary interventions. Government agencies in these states have expressed keen interest in the trials and hope to implement schemes to provide the fishermen with insulated boxes on the basis of their needs and demands.
- The Department of Home Science, Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visva-vidyalayam (S.P. Women's University), Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, organized at Tirupati at the end of November 1995 a seminar on "Techniques and activities to facilitate entrepreneurship development for Indian women". A large number of participants from various government and non-governmental organizations participated.
- The Tamil Nadu Fisheries Department is implementing a scheme to provide coastal fisherwomen with aluminium fish containers (of PHFP design) at 50% cost to facilitate better marketing. The target for 1995-96 is the distribution of 10,000 of these containers.
- The Orissa Rural Development and Marketing Society (ORMAS) organized at Bhubaneswar at the end of October 1995 a national seminar on "Marketing of Rural Products". ORMAS has shown interest in assisting fisherfolk processors to market their products.
- At the request of fisherwomen retail vendors, pilot studies have been initiated on the use of insulated ice boxes as a facility for gainful marketing in Orissa (Sahana-Astaranga and Chandrabhaga-Konark), Andhra Pradesh (for cycle traders at Jaggampeta) and Tamil Nadu (Neerodi and Marthandamthurai).

- At the request of fisherwomen sangam members organized by partner NGOs working with PHFP, demonstration and training programmes on hygienic fish-handling practices to minimize post-harvest loss in quality and value, and on simple processing technologies — like salting, sun-drying and pickling — were arranged by PHFP at different places in Tamil Nadu: Vellakoil and Porayar (Nagapattinam Quaid-e-Milleth district), Alikuppam (Chengalpattu MGR district), and Kovalam and Nagercoil (Kanyakumari district).
- PHFP, with the assistance of the Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA), has taken up a two-month study (November 6, 1995 to January 5, 1996), as a management traineeship segment, on the feasibility of production, distribution and marketing of salted oil sardines from the Coromandel coast of Tamil Nadu to markets in Kerala by the fisherfolk communities assisted by an NGO.
- Some of the NGOs working with fisherfolk in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu and south Andhra Pradesh have formed a network called East Coast Fisherfolk Forum (ECFF). They meet periodically to consider common issues and problems covering a larger geographical area than their own, and plan how best to tackle them jointly. The last meeting of the Forum was held in mid-December 1995, and we hope to cover it in the next issue of PHF News.

BANGLADESH

- A national workshop on “Fisheries Resources Development and Management in Bangladesh” was organized jointly by the Bangladesh Government, the FAO and the ODA at Dhaka at the end of October 1995. The workshop covered all aspects of fisheries: open-water fisheries (marine and freshwater), aquaculture (brackishwater and freshwater), credit, quality control, marketing, research and information.

The workshop was well attended by representatives from Government organizations, the private sector, financial institutions, traders, fisherfolk associations and NGOs. It formulated recommendations on resource management and development, to be considered by the authorities concerned.

SRI LANKA

- Cycle traders now have office space at St. John’s Market in Colombo for carrying out their activities. It has been allotted by the Ceylon Fisheries Corporation and was officially opened on December 20, 1995.
- ODA-PHFP is actively engaged with the Department of Fisheries and the Asian Development Bank Fisheries Sector Development Project in working with cooperatives in the post-harvest sector. The main thrust of this activity is the provision and demonstration of insulated ice boxes for bicycles, motor-bikes and the inshore 18-24 ft. FRP boats.

Editorial

Focus on Post-harvest Fisheries

This is the first anniversary of ODA’S PHF News, and the response so far to our publication has been encouraging. We have, in this issue, made some changes in the style and format of the newsletter, and we hope you like them.

One of the most significant changes is the inclusion of an article in the local languages of the East coast of India; later on, such articles will also appear in Bangla and Sinhala. This article can be easily removed in order that it can be photocopied and disseminated to the fishing communities, and ODA-PHFP will be actively encouraging this to take place.

There are two questions which we are frequently asked and are very relevant. This first is “what is meant by post-harvest?”, and

the second is “why focus on post-harvest?”.

Post-harvest fisheries concern those factors affecting activities from the time the fish is landed at the point of capture, or harvested, to the time the fish reaches the customer and is consumed. This is often associated with the processing and preservation of fish, particularly in the large-scale industrial fisheries. Although this is true, the focus must be much broader and not simply limited to technologies. It should embrace the cultural, environmental, economic, institutional, social; technical and marketing aspects of the supply, demand and preservation, processing and distribution of fish and fish products.

Over the last two decades, the inshore areas of all the countries

bordering the Bay of Bengal have been subjected to increasing fishing pressure from both the large-scale and small-scale sectors. Therefore, instead of promoting fishery capture and production-oriented practices and putting the already overburdened fisheries under even more strain, the focus must now be on improving the management of existing resources. It is of paramount importance that these resources are maximized through reducing wastage and adding value, and by making the most of what is already caught. Improving the efficiency of post-harvest handling and the processing and marketing of fish can have a significant impact on the incomes of the primary producers and market intermediaries. Moreover, the consumer also benefits through the availability of better-quality fish.

Assessment of Fish Losses – How to Do It

By Ansen Ward and John Ryder

Natural Resources Institute, U.K.

FISH is one of the most perishable of all protein foodstuffs. Spoilage, if not checked, will lead to quality deterioration and, at worst, eventually to “post-harvest losses”. This is a widely used term, and often loosely defined, and this alone can cause confusion when quoting figures for the amount of losses in the post-harvest sector.

It is generally recognized that there are three types of post-harvest fish loss: physical losses, economic, and nutritional.

In the context of this article, the most important are the physical and economic losses. Physical losses are defined as fish thrown away or eaten by insects. Economic loss refers to the loss in revenue the seller of fish suffers because the fish sold has not been sold for the best price attainable, due to spoilage or damage. These two types of loss can occur at any point in the distribution chain from capture to consumer—that is, during the processing, transportation, wholesaling and retailing, or marketing stages. They can also affect all sizes of trading or business operation.

Worldwide production of fisheries products is around 100 million tonnes per annum. It is now recognized that the scope to harvest more fish from the world’s oceans, lakes and rivers is becoming very much more limited. One of the ways of reducing the growing gap between fish production and demand is to make more of the resources after harvesting—that is, to reduce post-harvest fish losses. On a more micro level, the incentive to cost-effectively reduce post-harvest fish losses is the likelihood of increasing the level of income to fishing communities.

In order to be able to properly plan loss reduction strategies, information is needed on the magnitude of losses, the reasons why losses occur, and the socio-economic context within which they are found.

The identification of appropriate methodologies for identifying and addressing post-harvest losses in fisheries has long been recognized as a key research priority. At the meeting for the Strategy for International Fisheries Research in 1991, it was recommended that post-harvest fish losses should be a priority issue for future fisheries research. It was also concluded that there were no tried and tested techniques by which losses could be systematically assessed. Clearly, then, there was a need to develop sound and widely applicable methodologies to not only quantify fish losses, but also to assist fisheries policy makers and planners to understand the context of losses more fully. By having this sort of information, the people responsible for fisheries planning and policy-making would be able to accurately understand fish losses and to go on, if need be, to make informed decisions about how best to reduce fish losses.

The need for this research was taken on board by the ODA Post-Harvest Fisheries Research Programme in 1992. The Natural Resources Institute (NRI) initiated a research project in collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Tanzania to develop post-harvest fish loss assessment methodologies. Bearing in mind that the envisaged methodologies were to be as universally applicable as possible, Tanzania was seen as an ideal country for the research, as it offered a

variety of fishery types and a wide range of fish distribution networks, some of which spanned very large distances.

The methodologies

Two loss assessment methodologies were tried and tested by NRI in Tanzania with the help of the country’s Fisheries Division: a formal recall questionnaire survey method, and an informal method based on rapid and participatory rural appraisal.

The recall questionnaire survey is designed to be used to generate quantitative data, especially on the following:

- financial value of fish losses per fisherman or processor
- percentage levels of physical loss, economic loss and total loss
- the reasons why losses occur
 - what happens to fish that is classified as a loss.

This methodology is based on regular questionnaire interviews with fisherfolk or stakeholders working at particular stages of the fish distribution chain, i.e., fishing, processing, transport and retailing. These stages of the chain were chosen after an appraisal of the fishery. The questionnaires were then designed to suit the fishery and the specific distribution stage.

While there were many problems to come to grips with in attempting to develop the methods, two aspects of the research that are worth highlighting were:

- the problems in the use of traditional units for quantifying fish, and
- how to quantify losses in a multi-species fishery.

The units used to measure quantities of fish are often peculiar or particular to fisheries or products. Unless absolute values of these traditional units are known then, the conversion of data on quantities of fish, recorded in the answers to questionnaire interviews, into data that can be used for quantifying losses will be very difficult. This hurdle was overcome by including a specific question in the questionnaire which dealt only with the traditional units used. The answer to this question would include an estimate of the kilogram value of the traditional unit or units used in the other answers in the interview. Hence, during analysis it would be possible to convert all answers on quantities of fish to a standard value, kilograms, making it possible to easily compare and make calculations using all the data from the interviews.

Many fisheries are multi-species, and to be able to cope with collecting data in a multi-species fishery was perhaps the hardest part of the research. Focusing data collection on only a few species could exclude detecting significant losses of other species. To try to cover all species may be difficult to do accurately, or would certainly be very time-consuming and labour-intensive. After considerable and wide-ranging discussions, it was decided that the best approach was to get the client (and by this we mean the person who would be using the methodologies) to identify exactly what was needed from a survey, and then try to use that as a template to design the survey.

In Tanzania, the Fisheries Division was interested in the losses of the four most commercially important fish species. This then was what a survey was designed to target. However, depending on the needs of the client, and who the client is, the survey can be tailored to allow identification of losses according to any mix of species or species types. This is done by participative appraisal techniques, and the specific methods employed are dependent on the client type, e.g., single person, single Ministry, local group, artisanal sector, etc.

The data collected from the questionnaire surveys were stored in a computerized database. Once all the data on quantities of fish have been converted from traditional units to kilograms, it is then relatively easy to calculate the physical and economic losses on an interview-by-interview basis before going on to calculate average values according to particular variables such as product type or fishing gear.

The informal methodology is designed to generate indicative quantitative data and qualitative data on the following :

- indicative physical and economic loss levels
- estimates of monetary losses
- reasons for losses
- seasonal variations in loss levels
- the perceptions of fish losses by those who are affected by them
- importance of fish losses compared to other issues
- historical levels of fish losses.

New approaches

Over the last decade and a half, much attention has been given to the development of new approaches to

data collection, project identification, project evaluation and participatory development. The overall aim of this has been to involve the potential beneficiaries of development projects much more in the development process. The informal fish loss assessment methodology developed by the project is based on the tools and techniques of two of these techniques — rapid and participatory rural appraisal. The core of this methodology is semi-structured interviews or dialogue with fisherfolk which can be enhanced by using a variety of other tools to aid data collection, such as drawing maps, seasonal calendars and ranking.

During the course of the methodology development, several tools were developed that suit post-harvest fish loss assessment. An example is load tracking, where a sample of fish is assessed for quality at different stages of the distribution chain; meanwhile, data are recorded on critical influencing factors, such as the time the fish spends at ambient temperatures or the way it is processed and the time it spends in transit. Doing this can help identify why losses are occurring, and what could be done to improve on the situation and reduce losses.



semi-structured interviews with fisherfolk are a key tool in the information methodology

ODA Post-harvest Fisheries Focus in South Asia

Post-harvest fisheries problems are commonplace throughout the world, and many are solved by the more "efficient" utilization of the fisheries resources. The word 'efficient' is used intentionally, as it can mean many things, including maximizing return on investment, adding value, improving the amount of fish available as protein for human consumption, providing livelihoods for fishing communities, amongst others.

This improved utilization is achieved through transfer of existing knowledge to a new situation (and is not restricted to technical knowledge, but includes social, economic and marketing knowledge), or where that knowledge is missing, through well-targeted research, again across a wide range of disciplines. Through the ODA Post-Harvest Fisheries Project and the ODA Post-Harvest

Fisheries Research Programme (with the manager based in the U.K.), limited funds are available to assist fishing communities and small-scale processors in the realization of their aspirations with regard to use of the fisheries resources.

The two ODA Post-Harvest Programmes are in the process of strengthening their links with each other which will develop a close working relationship and interaction between research and broader developmental activities, so that the needs of the fishing communities are adequately addressed. The Madras office will act as a centre for any queries on post-harvest fisheries problems in the South Asian region. In case of any queries, or further information, on these programmes, please contact the project field manager based in Madras at the address given on page 14.

As a first stage in this initiative, a workshop was recently held in Madras, in which 26 participants from groups and organizations within India indicated some of the more pressing problems that need solving for the benefit of the artisanal communities and small-scale processors. A report on this workshop will be available from the Madras office in the New Year. Some of these problems will be specifically addressed through the Post-Harvest Fisheries Project, and others through the Research Programme. This combined approach will reinforce the means and commitment towards addressing post-harvest issues in South Asia in collaboration with national institutes and local development agencies.

Initially it was thought that the informal methodology would be used to generate purely qualitative data on why losses occur, what people think about losses, and the general background to fish losses from both a technical and a socio-economic viewpoint. It transpired that not only could the methodology do this, it could also be used to produce indicative quantitative data on the magnitude of losses, which compared favourably with the data produced by the formal recall questionnaire survey.

The two methodologies are designed to be complementary. It is important that when intervention strategies are to be planned both quantitative and qualitative data should be used. For example, the need to understand the context within which losses occur and the perceptions of people who suffer losses and are

affected by them is as important as knowing the levels of loss, especially if loss reduction strategies are to be planned well. If people do not perceive losses to be a problem, then it will be difficult to interest them in reducing losses. If people are concerned about losses, then the chances are they will be more receptive to reduction measures.

Although this tends to suggest that both methodologies should always be used to assess post-harvest losses in a particular fishery, it will be possible to use only the informal methodology alone mainly because it can be used to generate indicative quantitative data as well as qualitative. This is particularly important when time and other resources are limited and the level of accuracy of the quantitative data is not paramount, as the informal assessment method is quick to produce results and

less costly than the questionnaire methodology.

Total loss

During the course of the methodology research, it became apparent that in order to clarify post-harvest fish losses there needed to be a way of combining physical losses with economic losses. This would overcome the problem of having to separate both types of loss for individual fishing operators or traders. And also research was proving that often the economic loss was the more important in terms of magnitude.

So the term "total loss" was developed to describe combining the physical with economic loss. To give an example, a fisherman may sell some fish for a reduced price and also throw some fish away from the same catch.

The simplest way to define the overall loss in this case is to calculate the maximum value of the whole catch had it all been sold for the best price. Then calculate the value of fish thrown away and the loss in revenue as a result of selling fish for a reduced price. These two values are added together, and the total is expressed as a percentage of the maximum catch value; this is termed the total loss and expressed in percentage terms, although it could also be expressed as a monetary value. The research has concluded that total loss is a useful way of quantifying and stand; dizing the two main types of loss that can occur in a particular fishery.

Future

At the present time, the methodologies are being written up as a training manual –a "version one" if you like. The manual will be designed to be a practical guide for anyone who wishes to investigate post-harvest fish losses, particularly fisheries researchers and extension workers or post-harvest specialists as well as socio-economists. Although the methodologies were developed in the context of artisanal fisheries, there is also probably scope

for the manual to be used by people in private-sector business, to characterize losses in their particular environment for the purpose of increasing efficiency and profit.

It is planned that this "version one" of the manual will be used for field-testing the fish loss assessments in other countries of the world, and currently NRI is identifying collaborating institutions in South Asia for this work. The objective of testing the manual in other countries is so that any adjustments that are certain to be needed can be made.

The development of the methodologies generated a tremendous amount of data on post-harvest losses in Tanzania. This is currently being compiled for the Tanzanian Government.

The Tanzanian data also formed the basis for the next phase of the project, the setting up of a database on post-harvest fish losses. It is planned that subsequent loss data generated by the methodologies will be incorporated into the database, the purpose of which is to provide the basis to allow

"modelling" of fish losses. This would allow users to interrogate the model and predict losses in their type of fishery — where losses will occur, why they occur, and the level at which they occur. This work is still underway, and will be reported on in a later issue of this newsletter.

Clearly, once a loss has been identified, the most important question that then arises is "What do you do about it?". In nearly all cases, the major factor in determining the type and level of intervention will be economics. Thus, decision-makers also need a tool to assess the "cost" of recovering the lost "quality" of the fish resource. Once this information is available, an appropriate, and very likely sustainable, intervention can be implemented. This has led the project team to investigate the development of a model to predict the cost of the improved quality (or reduced loss). In the genesis of this quality costing model, it was decided that the widely adopted quality assurance and hazard analysis critical control point (HACCP) approaches lend themselves admirably to the development of this model.

To our Readers

We are happy to inform you that we have received comments and suggestions regarding *PHF* News from some of our readers. We have taken due note of these and shall do our best to implement the suggestions wherever possible.

We invite contributions, including letters, from readers for publication in the newsletter. These could relate to a fisheries event, your work with fisher-folk communities, or any other issue concerning small-scale fisheries.

Contributions should be preferably in English and typewritten (double-spaced for easier editing). Any illustrations — photographs (black and white if possible), sketches or diagrams — will also be welcome.

Articles in Tamil, Telugu, Oriya and Bengali are also invited. We will translate them into English and other local languages. We will, in suitable cases, include copies of these articles as an "insert" to our newsletter.

Contributors note: Please give your full name, designation (if any) and complete postal address.

World Women's Conference in China: Some Impressions

The recently held 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, China (September 1995) brought into sharp focus many gender-related issues. The media gave wide coverage both to the main UN-sponsored conference, attended by government-sponsored delegates, and to the parallel NGO Forum held at nearby Huairou. The NGO meeting, in particular, brought together women from various parts of the world who, in their own ways, have been actively working for development, fighting for their rights, and looking for alternatives,

Ms. R. VERONICA, head of one of ODA's partner NGOs – Rural Organization for Social Action (ROSA) – was among the participants from India in the NGO Forum. In a discussion with ODA-PHFP staff who met her recently in her office at Porayar, in Quaid-e-Milleth district of Tamil Nadu, she spoke about her experiences in China and her impressions of the NGO Forum and its relevance to her own work. Major excerpts from the discussion follow:

It is indeed wonderful that one of our project partners had the opportunity to participate in the Women's Conference in China. How did it come about?

Ms. Veronica: This opportunity came unexpectedly. Application forms had been sent out to various NGOs. I received one which I filled up with the expectation that participation in this would help me in understanding problems faced by women from other

countries too and the strategies adopted by them in solving these problems. I was thus very happy when my participation was confirmed. Funds for the visit were provided by DANIDA (Danish International Development Agency). We had a preparatory meeting at Bangalore for participants from southern India, which helped provide us with an orientation on the summit. We had a similar one at Delhi prior to our departure for Beijing.

What, in your opinion, was the need for a parallel NGO summit when there was already a government-sponsored one?

The main conference was sponsored by the UN and member-governments. Even though the NGOs had been involved in providing information for

the papers presented, the government delegates wanted to play down certain issues (e.g., female infanticide in the case of India) since it would have its implications on them as policy-makers



Ms. R. Veronica

The NGO summit, however, helped in bringing into focus many such problems. Besides, it was a sort of experience-sharing for the 30,000 participants who were able to reach out to one another, women to women. There were women from West Asian countries in purdah, women from our country, and others who were themselves victims of many of the crimes against women that were under discussion. Besides this, it helped in understanding the relevance of certain international policies. For instance, nuclear disarmament is something that is talked about in many international forums. However, only when we meet some of the victims of nuclear warfare from Japan that we truly empathize and understand the need for nuclear disarmament.

What was the sort of representation in the fisheries sector?

There were not many NGOs from other countries working in the fisheries sector. Japan and Singapore had some NGO representatives working with fishing communities.

Did you feel any North-South bias (both in the Indian and international context) in setting the agenda?

No.

How were the issues organized for discussion?

There were workshops and media exhibitions being held on various issues in which interested individuals could participate. I participated in a number of workshops dealing with, among

others, fisherwomen and Indigenous women, violence and atrocities against women, and structural adjustment policy and its implications for women.

What were your contributions at these workshops?

In the workshop on structural adjustment policy and its implications for women, I spoke about the manner in which the proliferation of prawn farms has affected the life of fisherwomen in the Nagapattinam area. One of the effects has been the destruction of the casuarina groves, which has resulted in a reduction of the fuel available to these women increasing collection time. Besides this, many of these groves were used by women to relieve themselves in the absence of toilets in their villages. Now, with the destruction of these groves, they have lost out on this.

Provision of employment to women has not come in either. There has also been forcible sale of land in this area through closure of certain sluices during the peak agricultural season. The area was declared as wasteland and diverted for prawn farming.

The workshop on violence against women gave me an opportunity to speak about the violence that most fisherwomen face in their families. Most of them have no decision-making power within their households. They are thrust with the responsibility of providing the men with credit assistance, besides being solely responsible for household work and child care.

To bring out the violence against these women, I presented some case studies. One of them was about a girl who eloped with a boy from their community. Her brother was so furious about this that he tricked the couple into their house with promise of marriage, and killed the girl. This happened in one of the villages that we are working in.

Besides this, I also highlighted the link between alcoholism and violence against women in these villages.

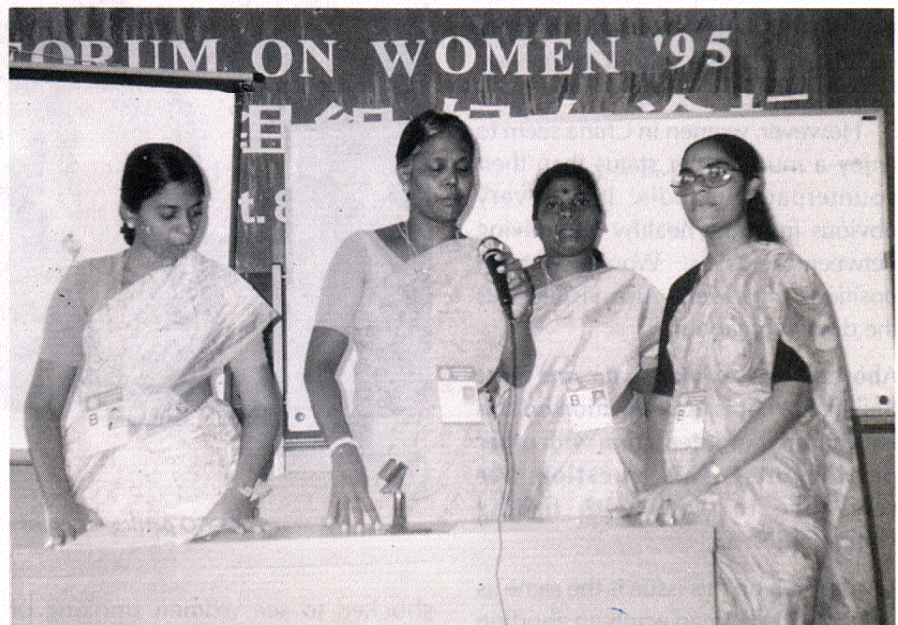
Did you suggest any strategies?

We had a separate workshop in which strategies relating to these issues were discussed. The strategies suggested by me were basically experiences of ROSA at the field level. Group formation at the grassroots level is very important. Through these groups one could address various problems and introduce savings and credit programmes for these women. The need for educational/training centres

Western and Third World countries with respect to women's rights?

There certainly was a difference. Demands of women from Western countries were primarily those relating to control over their bodies and sexual freedom, while in the case of Third World countries it was more a question of violation of basic human rights.

As a person with considerable experience in working with fishing communities, don't you think that controlling a woman's sexuality has been one of the instruments by which men have dominated women? Consequently, don't you think that



At a discussion at the NGO Forum at Huairou, near Beijing. Ms. Veronica (second from right) is seen with three fellow delegates.

for the creation of awareness is also important.

Would these strategies empower women?

By themselves these would not empower them. These are just entry points into the community through which we could reach the core of the problems.

You have had the opportunity of sharing experiences with women from various countries on many issues. Were there any differences between

unless a woman attains control over her body she cannot assert control in any other sphere?

Yes, it is a fact that in fishing communities a woman's 'purity' is regarded as the basis for the fisherman's safety at sea and also the abundance of the catch. One of the reasons for this could be the lack of trust of women since they form, through their marketing activities, the interface between the community and the outside world. It reflects the basic insecurity and possessiveness of the men. It is also true

that in these communities most women have very little decision-making power, even in matters like the size of their family. While in the West it is more a question of a right to certain sexual behaviours like lesbianism, in India the problem relates more to violation of basic human rights, like inability to make decisions at any level.

How do you rate the position of women in India when compared to other countries?

The position of women in most South Asian countries is very similar. We face the same problems. However, when compared to certain West Asian countries, I think we are definitely better off. Certain practices like female genital mutilation, which are quite common in these countries, were news to me!

However, women in China seem to enjoy a much better status than their counterparts in India; it was very obvious from the healthy intermixing between the sexes. Women were in positions of power. Also visible was the dignity of labour.

Abortion was an issue that came up at Beijing. What is your position on this issue after your interaction with other participants? This question has relevance to work with fishing communities.

My position on this issue is the same as before: if the woman wants an abortion she should have the right to do so. Most fisherwomen have to undergo numerous pregnancies to produce sons; they are usually forced into it. Besides this, there are certain cases like teenage pregnancies and unwed motherhood, where this is the only alternative. As for religion being used as a deterrent, it is very important that there is a correct interpretation of religious tenets.

What about 'responsible parenthood', which some countries had proposed as a solution?

This is operational only if the man considers the woman as equal within the family set-up. Women should be given the option of exercising this right

when this responsibility is forsaken by the male.

There has been a lot of stereotyping of feminists in the past and now. How much of this stereotyped behaviour is real and how much is acquired!

This meeting has been very helpful to me in understanding, analyzing and changing my own attitudes. Earlier, I would have been very

What are your comments on the facilities for, and the treatment of, delegates by the Chinese authorities?

some reports in the Indian media presented a distorted picture. The Chinese treated us very well. There were student volunteers posted round the clock working on a shift basis. They were of great assistance to us.



A group of NGO participants seen outside their place of residence at Beijing

shocked to see women smoking or drinking. However, interactions with various feminists helped me to understand that, like men, women also need some form of coping mechanism to escape from their troubled existence.

But how far is the patriarchal society responsible for laying down the rules for the right to a certain behaviour pattern?

It is true that our behaviour pattern is very much conditioned by the patriarchal society within which we live. All of us have imbibed it to such an extent that anything out of the set pattern is seen as deviant behaviour.

Would your experiences in China help in post-harvest fisheries activities?

The Beijing experience has given me a lot of insight into various gender issues. Besides broadening my horizons, it has also helped me to examine my own attitude to certain things. All this has had implications in the planning process with respect to project activities, all of which would now have a gender focus. Certain ideas have now become convictions: one such has been the need to have a training centre where training could be imparted not just to fisherwomen and animators but also to local women, students, etc., on gender issues and income-generation activities.

A Sangam for Small-scale Marketing by Fisherwomen

ARAMBAKKAM, in Gummidipoondi taluk of Chengalpattu MGR district, Tamil Nadu, is the main market centre for the fisherwomen of Nochikuppam, Battakuppam, Bethaniakuppam, Venkatesaperumal Nagar, Pudupakkam and Beemalavari-palayam villages along Pulicat Lake to trade in fresh and dried fish. But the women head loaders had a hard time to make both ends meet, having had to pay interest of 10-15 per cent to run their trade.

These small-scale market women were fully exploited by the rich folk. The annual market auction was cornered by the rich men, who taxed the head loaders as they fancied. Basic facilities, like drinking water, bathrooms, toilets and lights, were also not provided in the marketplace. In addition, the women suffered for lack of sheds to protect their goods from rain and heat.

At this point of time, the Association for the Rural Poor (ARP) and Coastal Poor Development Action Network (COPDANET) had established Arambakkam as their centre and were working in the Pulicat Lake area and also in Dalit villages for the development of the people. Small-scale market women of Arambakkam had awareness education and gained confidence to tackle their problems by themselves.

The small-scale fisherwomen wanted a women's sangam to be started so that they could try and solve their own problems. On April 16, 1993, the women were gathered together and informed of the necessity of being united and having a place of their own to share their problems. A few months later, on August 7, a small-scale marketing women's sangam with 107 members was inaugurated, after a series of meetings. The sangam enabled the women to think collectively and speak out their problems, and work for their development. The women's forum was identified in the village and the neighbouring areas, and the sangam brought prestige and status to the women.

Fund created

The first decision taken by the women's sangam was that they should free themselves from the bondage of debt. They therefore decided to contribute Rs. 50 each and thus create a fund. The 107 members saved Rs. 5,350. The women had a total of Rs. 10,850 with the incentive given by COPDANET. The members of the sangam were happy to give out loans at a low rate of interest to fellow members who were struggling with unending debts.

The demands of the women for bare necessities at the marketplace are

being met. COPDANET gave a grant of Rs. 1.5 lakh to build 20 rooms for the small-scale marketing women.

The women met Government officials to get their problems redressed. Demonstrations were also held periodically in front of the offices of high Government officials. The small-scale marketing women have not only built up their status but also increased the funds available to them. At the time of a cyclone, a sum of Rs. 500 was distributed to each woman to help solve their problems.

On February 28, 1995, the women participated in the Government auction of the market and took it for Rs. 13,000; that was a great success for them. The rich who had ruled over the women for generations must have realized that their game was up. As successful bidders at the auction, the women will gain Rs. 59,000 per year. They just have to make sure that they manage the job well and with care.

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The views expressed in the articles in this Newsletter are those of the authors / contributors concerned, and not necessarily of the Overseas Development Administration.

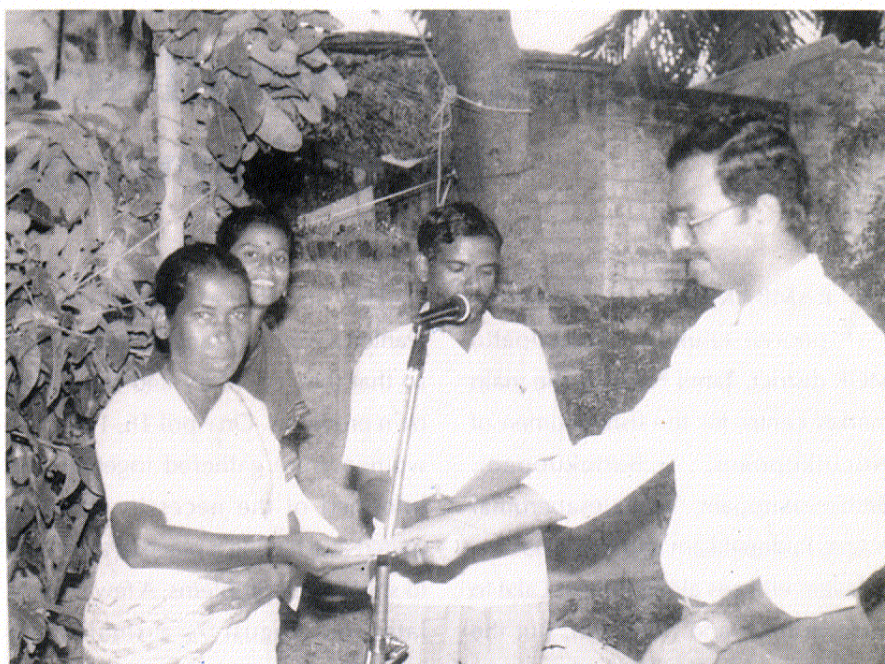
Santhidan Celebrates World Food Day

SANTHIDAN, a non-governmental organization working for the empowerment of fisherwomen in two districts of Tamil Nadu (Kanyakumari and Chengalpattu MGR) celebrated the second anniversary of the unit in the latter district, and also World Food Day, at Neelankarai, a coastal village near Madras, on October 16, 1995.

Ms. Banumathy Bhaskar, President of the Tamil Nadu Fisherwomen Front, presided over the function. Ms. S. Sulochana, President of the Chengalpattu MGR District Fisherwomen Development Society, Inaugurated the function by lighting the traditional kuthovilakku (lamp)

Ms. M.H. Kalavathy, a marine anthropologist, spoke on women in fisheries. Mr. N. Vijayalayan, Technical Officer of the ODA Post-Harvest Fisheries Project, explained how post-harvest activities helped improve the income of fisherwomen.

On the occasion of World Food Day, a sum of Rs. 50,000 was



Mr. N. Vijayalayan releasing loans to fisherwomen. The others in the picture are Mr. M.A. Sekar and Ms. Kalpana Satish of Santhidan.

distributed as loans to the fisherwomen of Kottivakkam, Palavakkam, Chinna Neelankarai, Prria Neelankarai and Injambakkam villages from their own savings collections.

A street play, Engalai Konjam Parunga ("Please understand our plight"), was enacted to create awareness among the fisherwomen on the role of women's sangams.

Profile

Ariyamuthu – A True Episode

AN EXTENSIVE stretch of beach along the clear blue waters of the Bay of Bengal and more than 200 thatched huts clustered nearby: this is Kuttiyandiyur, a fishing village near Tarngampadi, in Nagapattinam Quaid-e-Milleth district of Tamil Nadu.

It was in this village that Ariyamuthu lived with her parents, who decided to get her married when she was 15 years

old. Ariyamuthu was, however, not happy to be married at such a young

Story of a fisherwoman who, though born and brought up in a poor family and living among the poor, involved herself folly in the welfare of the community and fought successfully against social evils and degradation.

age. Among the fisherfolk in her community, girls mostly do not have a choice to decide when to get married or who the husband should be. The girls are expected to abide by their parents' decision in the matter. In the case of Ariyamuthu, her parents were disturbed by her 'unhelpful' attitude; however, after some persuasion she consented and was married to a leading fisherman of the village. They have two children -a girl and a boy.



Mrs. Ariyamuthu

Ariyamuthu had a natural interest and desire to solve the problems of others in the fishing community. She used to feel sad whenever any members of the community were oppressed, and wanted to help them in one way or the other.

The non-governmental organization ROSA (Rural Organization for Social Action), based at Tarangampadi, conducts weekly meetings of the women in Kuttiyandiyur. Ariyamuthu

used to attend these meetings: she would listen carefully whenever the discussion turned to such subjects as increasing the incomes of the fisherwomen through fish processing, the use of fish containers for marketing, the use of ice for preserving fish, and the hygienic preparation of salt/dried fish. Moreover, when general and common problems relating to the village were discussed, she felt an urge to participate actively. She was also appreciative of any discussions on ways and means of increasing the income of members of the women's groups/associations through the fish trade.

Ariyamuthu used to sell the fish caught by her husband, and this was their normal daily routine. Kuttiyandiyur lacks (proper transport facilities. Ariyamuthu has to walk five kilometres to reach the nearby town, and another 3.5 km going round the streets in the town for retail house-to-house selling of the fish; finally, she has to walk back 5 km to

reach her home. All this effort provides her a net daily income of Rs. 25-35. In case she has taken a loan for fish marketing, she has to pay the interest on it

At Kuttiyandiyur, drinking water was a problem causing great difficulty to the women; the matter was discussed by the women at the sangam. Getting assistance from or through the Government was leading to delays, and many members wished to solve the problem by themselves.

Ariyamuthu came up with the suggestion that the women's sangam should meet half the cost, with the balance to be met by the NCO. This suggestion was accepted. Ariyamuthu played a leading role in getting this work executed. The sangam women elected Ariyamuthu as their President and leader in appreciation of her signal achievement in arranging drinking water supplies for the village



Drying fish on racks



A discussion on savings with fisherwomen sangam members

Training courses

The NGO decided to work for awareness development among the women and for income-generation activities. These were also the dream of Ariyamuthu, and so she strove to involve all the womenfolk in the various training programmes directed towards these ends.

When the women were unable to market the fish profitably, Ariyamuthu organized the purchase of fish by the sangam through a common fund to which the women contributed; and as explained during the training courses, fish drying racks were put up and quality dried fish was produced. This evoked a positive response from the sangam members, who developed confidence and participated enthusiastically in income-generation

activities and training courses related to the fish trade.

The women engaged in fish marketing trek daily a distance of from 5-10 km, and consequently their health and family welfare is greatly affected. To overcome this problem and provide transport facility to the sangam women, Ariyamuthu has sought the help of the NGO.

High aspirations

Ariyamuthu was born in a poor fisherfolk family, but her aspirations are high and noble and the women's sangam was a helpful base to organize, provide directional motivation and channel her efforts for welfare activities. With the support and assistance of ROSA, the sangam was able to work efficiently as a welfare organization.

It is the duty of all organizations involved in social service to motivate each and every fisherwoman to work for the betterment of the community. It will be possible to implement useful activities for the development of the fisherfolk community by establishing village-level women's organizations, identifying persons with rare good qualities as in the case of Ariyamuthu, and motivating and helping them.

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