



Sri Lanka's Mobile Fish Traders

What do bicycles and motor cycles have to do with fish? In Sri Lanka, a diligent bicycle and motorcycle brigade acquires and delivers fish daily to hundreds of homes. Pages 6-9 provide glimpses into the lifestyle and workstyle of these remarkable fish traders.



EDITORIAL

Itinerant Fish Traders

In most fishing communities of Asia and Africa, women have the primary and often exclusive responsibility for marketing fish and fishery products. The success of women in marketing depends on many factors: prices, level of competition, distance to market outlets, preservation of fish. The growth of urban populations has led to a change in the pattern of demand for fish, consumers increasingly want higher quality products delivered in a form which is convenient to them. The ODA Post Harvest Fisheries Project has been working with small-scale itinerant fish traders (both women and men) in the informal marketing sector to address the difficulties they face.

In Sri Lanka it is men who are the small-scale itinerant fish traders. They play an important role in the informal marketing of fresh fish to outlying urban areas by bicycle or motor-cycle from centres such as St John's market in Colombo. This trade had developed in recent years to meet the demand for fresh fish in the hinterland. In India it is women who mainly operate in the informal marketing sector as fish vendors selling fish at the roadside, at markets, or door to door. In Bangladesh, the marketing system is very closely linked to credit arrangements between fisherfolk and large-scale traders. The informal marketing sector is divided between door-to-door fish sellers and market retailers who deal with the poorest fish-consuming sectors of the community.

Although fish traders often face difficulties, it is the women fish traders in particular who are often more disadvantaged. They have to walk long distances to markets and/or bus stops with heavy loads. Their access to credit is limited; this restricts their operating capacity. Transport of fish by local buses/trains is often not allowed or they have to resort to bribes to gain entry. Often it is not possible to procure small quantities of ice. Basic facilities are generally not made available at markets.

The project addresses these issues by working with fishing communities and development agencies. It focuses on improving access to transport and markets, increasing credit options; improving handling and reduction losses through simple low-cost technological interventions, and conducting systematic studies of the market options available.



News Round-Up

Guidelines for post-harvest interventions

Development interventions aimed at the rural poor are a complex business, riddled with traps and pitfalls, with more exceptions than rules. Some interventions work, many don't. Can an intervention strategy be designed so that a project achieves effective, positive impact at all times? Or most of the time?

PHFP held a two-week workshop in December 1996 to formulate such a strategy. Another aim was to redesign the project's log-frame to reflect the direction of the project better and more fully. Mr. Steve Jones from Cambridge facilitated the workshop. Some 30 delegates took part in the workshop - project staff from Madras, Kakinada, Bhubaneswar, Dhaka and Colombo, plus representatives from NGOs and counterpart organizations such as

ROSA, Santhidan, COPDANET and INASIA (Colombo).

No punches were pulled. Both heat and light were generated, and participants

made the fur fly, as they discussed dissemination of intervention strategies on fisheries. It was decided that the project would during 1997 produce a "how-to" manual for use by everyone - government, non-government, private sector, community-based organizations. It would also commission a paper analysing policy constraints to artisanal

The project's "intervention" in Kanyakumari is in the form of support to the NGO Santidhan.



post-harvest development; it would prepare a report reviewing the project's three phases; it would develop a marketing strategy to ensure effective dissemination of project ideas through various media.

The workshop discussed the report of a private consultancy firm that was to recommend a Framework for Impact Assessment, enabling the project to periodically review the impact of its activities. The workshop agreed that the report needed some revisions. A revised report is now being studied.

The project is holding another workshop, January 20-30, 1997, to discuss and finalize the proposed manual for government agencies and NGOs.

Ms Ann Gordon from NRI, UK, visited the project November 1996 to do a case-study of the Nellai Kattabomman Chidambaranar district fish workers development society, Kootapani. Her visit followed the society's request to ODA-PHFP for funding support. The society has been remarkably successful in fish marketing, and has eliminated middlemen. Dynamic leadership, training, and recruitment of people with fish marketing expertise are other factors behind the society's success. A case study is being prepared.

Denmark's Minister for Development and Co-operation visited project activities in Tranquebar, Tamil Nadu. He saw a demonstration by women fish traders of ODA-PHFP activities. He evinced keen interest in the manufacture of fish pickles; ROSA, which receives project support, is assisting communities in the manufacture.

Seminars & Workshops

- Project field manager Duncan King and the Women-in-Development Officer Gomati Balasubramanian attended a seminar on linkage banking, "NGOs as intermediaries in micro-finance: than Indian

experience," organized by NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development). Several papers on the role of NGOs were presented.

The Fourth Fisheries Forum at Kochi in November 1996 was attended by George Mathew, Officer, Socio-Economic Unit, and Venkatesh Salagrama, Field Liaison and Extension Officer, Andhra Pradesh. They presented two papers: "Alternate paradigms for evaluation—case study of a credit intervention" by George Mathew; and "Icing of fish: learnings of the ODA Post-Harvest Fisheries Project", by Venkatesh Salagrama and Duncan King.

PHFP's Kakinada office organized a one-day workshop on "Problems and prospects in introduction of post-harvest technologies". It aimed at creating awareness of post-harvest issues among institutions

concerned with artisanal fisheries in Andhra Pradesh. The Department of Fisheries and other agencies took part. The experiences of communities dealing with project technologies were discussed.

Under the project's "training of trainers" programme, a group of animators from ROSA, Nagapattinam, underwent a course on leadership skills. It aimed at improving the skills of animators in the conduct of group meetings, and at documenting the community's experiences.

A five-day workshop on post-harvest technologies was conducted at the Indranarayanpur Nazrul Smrita Sangha (INSS) training Centre at Ramnagarabad in 24 Parganas district. Seven NGOs involved in the artisanal fisheries sector took part in the workshop. Project staff from Dhaka and Kakinada conducted it.

Ice box trial with a Nava in Andhra Pradesh.



Andhra Pradesh cyclone

A severe cyclonic storm hit the coast of Andhra Pradesh near Kakinada, where the project has its regional office; on November 6, 1996. The cyclone devastated east and west Godavari districts, especially the project villages of Yetimoga, Uppalanka, Ramannapalem, BCV Palem, Pallam and Pandi. The project has been promoting the use of ice and smoking bins in these villages. Smoking activity is going on, however.

Following the cyclone, the ODA's emergency aid department is considering a proposal to provide assistance through PHFP to Andhra

The project has made available tricycles for fish transport to women fish vendors in Periakuppam (near Mahabalipuram) and Nagapattinam.



Pradesh in response to an appeal from the Director of Fisheries.

Floods following severe rainfall also hit several parts of Tamil Nadu. In Nagapattinam – where ROSA, the project's partner NGO, operates - residential buildings and dwellings collapsed, roads were damaged and many months of patient and painstaking development work was undone.

Use of ice

Can catamarans carry ice boxes out to sea? Will they find it useful? Catamaran seaworthiness trials are

being conducted with fishermen of Ennore near Madras. Four boxes – two manufactured by Wintech, two others by the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Sangams – given to the fishermen in December are presently in use on an experimental basis. Data are being collected.

Catamaran ice boxes were given in December to petty fish traders who are members of credit groups formed by the NGOs Santhidan (in Nagercoil) and ROSA (in Nagapattinam). The Santhidan traders have reported that the boxes are useful; one problem they face is that of placing large fish in the boxes. ROSA traders have not used the boxes

yet since landings have been poor on account of a rough sea.

NGO Support & Government links

The project has made tricycles available to petty fish traders and with funds provided by the British Partnership Scheme (BPS). The tricycles are being used in Periakuppam near Madras (where the NGO COPDANET is active in a few fishing villages), Nagapattinam (where ROSA is active).

The tricycles are being effectively used in Nagapattinam. An additional tricycle has been obtained from the BPS.

The project has been strengthening its links with the OXFAM India Trust. The West Bengal unit of OXFAM will monitor ice boxes given to INSS, an agency in 24 Pargamas district.

The project will provide printed materials for the Department of Fisheries stall at an industrial exhibition in Hyderabad. A few fish products will be on display. National and international agencies will take part.

CIFT, Vizag, has offered to provide resource persons for the project's training programmes in fish handling and processing.

Bangladesh

The PHFP's London-based Social Development Adviser, Mr Mick Blowfield, toured project activities in Bangladesh. (These include support to NGOs working with coastal fishing communities; and assistance to set bagnet communities. Three models of institutional support for set bagnet communities are being developed in three different settings: North Bakkhali, Chittagong; Rakhainpara in Cox's Bazar; and Rehanian in Hatiya. These models will help a better understanding of set bagnet communities.) Mr Blowfield helped draw up guidelines and criteria for selecting small, grassroots-level NGOs.

Community-level work with women's savings and loans groups is making good progress in Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Hatiya island. Effective linkages for development are being established. Training to build the groups is continuing.

A one-day workshop was held on December 18 to initiate a process of networking and joint planning for NGOs working in coastal areas of Bangladesh. Sixteen NGOs took part. They identified priority issues concerning set bagnet communities. A two-day follow-up meeting was held mid-January 1997 in Chittagong to give effect to the form, functions and activities of a Coastal Set Bagnet Fisherfolk Network.

A report has been prepared on the project's activities in support of set bagnet communities.

Sri Lanka

There has been a spurt in the membership of cycle trader associations in Colombo and Negombo. The number has exceeded 200 in Colombo and 150 in Negombo. The Hatton National Bank is considering providing loans to

bicycle traders to upgrade their vehicles to motorcycles. Three traders who had earlier taken long-term loans to buy motorcycles have repaid the loans.

Pilot-scale demonstrations of ice boxes are continuing in the districts of Puttalam, Chilaw and Tangalle. A few manufacturing problems have been identified—such as lack of uniformity in the spread of foam between the inner

and outer covers of fibreglass. A consultant from Andhra Pradesh experienced in the design and manufacture of ice boxes visited Sri Lanka to study possible solutions.

An ice box was placed for sale in a co-operative shop run by the Ministry. There's good demand for it. Some fishermen have placed orders for the box.

Extension of ice boxes is to be taken up by the ADB-funded Fisheries Sector Development Project.

The Officer, Socio-Economic Unit, visited Sri Lanka to monitor data collection on the use of ice boxes aboard 22-foot craft. He met with managers of co-operatives of the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources who have been collecting data. A quality control check of data revealed a few gaps. The SEU officer explained the manner in which data is to be collected.

Fisherfolk communities in Sri Lanka (left) and Bangladesh (below) are being assisted through support to NGOs.



Sri Lanka's mobile fish traders

by S.R. Madhu

"No meal is complete without fish." A lot of people think so in Sri Lanka— young and old, men and women, the opulent and the indigent. No wonder a well-organized distribution network caters to them — that of small-scale cycle fish traders. Using cycles and motor-cycles, these traders buy 20-30 kg of fish every morning before the crack of dawn at the busy and bustling St. John's wholesale fish market in Colombo. They then use pedal power to travel 10 to 15km and deliver fish to regular customers.

Some 800 bicycle traders and several motorcycle traders operate from St. John's Fish Market. A few hundred more are active in Negombo, Kandy, Doddanduwa, or at numerous fish landing centres.

In Colombo, fish traders arrive early at 4.30 a.m. at St. John's Fish Market to buy fish caught at night. They quickly decide what fish to buy, mix with it about 7-10 kg of crushed ice. Some traders stop by the roadside to cut, fillet and prepare their fish for marketing. Most traders use rattan baskets, wooden or galvanized boxes strapped to the cycles to transport and deliver the fish.

The cycle traders have demarcated areas of Greater Colombo among themselves for fish sale. They do an efficient job of it. Most areas of the city are covered.

The cycle fish traders are slightly more expensive than the fish shops along Colombo's roads which get fresh fish

supplies directly from wholesale traders. Who patronizes the cycle fish traders? There are different kinds — the well-to-do; families where the housewife goes out to work and has

little time to shop; old people who are not mobile; households that have no refrigerator and need to buy fish every day.

The traders keep a small supply of small-sized or trash fish for impecunious old customers who can't afford high-quality fish and don't go out often to shop. They pay for their fish once a month perhaps soon after they get their pension. These customers don't buy fish every day, perhaps twice or thrice a week.

"Without my fish-trader cyclist, I would be lost," says a housewife in Colombo.



"It saves me a lot of hassle," says another. "I don't have the time to go looking for fish... There are so many other errands to do."

The ODA-PHFP has been trying to assist the mobile fish traders of Sri Lanka. In 1994, the project supported the cycle traders' initiative to set up the St. John's Fish Traders Co-operative Association in Colombo. It now has 200 members. A similar association set up in Negombo (1995) has 150 members. The two associations operate various loan and insurance schemes. They also give the traders identity cards— which the latter find useful because of the tight security regulations in Colombo.

Says Mr. Duncan King, ODA-PHFP Project Field Manager, "The cycle fish traders play a vital role in the marketing and distribution of fish. In the process of helping them, we wanted to avoid a purely technological approach. By tackling their social problems, we would demonstrate our empathy with them.

"Group formation is the first step toward helping any rural target group. The collective approach builds strength and self-reliance. This is why we encouraged the cycle dealers to form associations at St. John's Market and Negombo. Since they needed credit, we initiated thrift and savings schemes. These facilitated bank credit."

The average daily sales of the cycle fish traders range from Rs. 2000 to Rs. 3000. Daily profit varies from Rs. 200 to Rs. 300. But it's a life of unremitting toil, and the traders are on their toes all day. Says Mr. Chamindra Weerakody of IRED (an international NGO, now

1. A motorcycle trader loads his vehicle
2. Motor-cycles galore.
3. Want this? A fish trader at St. John's Market in Colombo, from where the mobile traders buy fish early in the morning.





renamed INASIA) which implements ODA-PHFP's activities with cycle fish traders "Often, a cycle fish trader lives in one area of Colombo, buys his fish from another area, supplies customers in a third area and obtains credit from a fourth area. He shuttles back and forth from place to place. Collecting cash from customers is exhausting. At the end of the day, the cycle trader is dog-tired and hits bed like a sack. PHFP's assistance to the traders is welcome and timely."



Says George Mathew, socio-economic officer of ODA-PHFP "Many of the cycle fish traders have taken to this occupation as a last resort. They lost jobs they held earlier because of privatization programmes. They now make enough for their living, but have little time for the family. The associations set up at the project's initiative give these traders a sense of identity and belonging, and a forum for positive action."



In 1991, the project conducted a study on the fish traders at St. John's Market in collaboration with the Institute of Post-Harvest Technology, NARA. The study said that the boxes carried by the cycle traders needed to be improved. An improved insulated ice box would enable the fish trader to widen his



market area; give him more time to sell fish; maintain fish quality for a longer period; reduce losses and spoilage from fish melting. The consumer would get healthier and better-quality fish.

A number of prototype boxes were designed and shown to traders. On the basis of their comments, a modified version of the box was designed. Blue Star Marine, a commercial firm, made a prototype fibreglass box for motor-cycle traders in 1992. But the cost, at Rs. 4000, was considered too high. Sujith Fibreglass Works, Negombo, made a prototype FRP box for just Rs. 2000. It can be used by bicycle traders as well as by motor cycle traders. But leaks and cracks appeared in the box because of the inferior material used in its construction.

For non-urban areas, where the traders travel as far as 200 km and drop fish off at retailers, two types of prototype boxes were constructed; one for motor cycles, a smaller one for push-cycles. Two companies, ONIWI and V J Boatyard, constructed the motor cycle prototypes at a cost of Rs. 3000 to Rs. 4000.

All the ice boxes are at an experimental stage. More work needs to be done on improving quality and lowering cost.



Data is being collected from the cycle traders and their views obtained.

Interviews with cycle fish traders

"I buy big fish (seerfish, tuna and prawns) at St. John's Fish Market every day," says D K D Zoysa, president of the 126-member co-operative of cycle fish dealers in Colombo. "People like to buy big fish. They can be cut easily and eaten." Zoysa delivers his big fish every day between 7.30 and 11.30 a.m. to 15 regular (and fairly well-to-do) customers spread over a distance of 5 km.

Zoysa's average daily income is about Rs. 2500; the profit is about Rs. 300. The highest profit he has made on any single day is Rs. 500. The best fish season is May through July, he says.

Zoysa has been a cycle fish trader for 15 years. He lives near the Kelaniya bridge at Orugodawatta, 3 km from St. John's Fish Market. Before entering this business, he was a labour supervisor in the rubber estate business. He liked this job, but had to quit when the business was privatized.

Zoysa preserves his fish in ice. Earlier he used a galvanized box. He prefers the new FRP box (made by Sujith Fibreglass Works) to the old one. It preserves fish better, keeps it clean and odour-free. But it has some defects - cracks on the boxes. Zoysa has so far paid Rs. 700 over a period of five or six months for the Rs. 2000 box.

P.S. Rajendra, 24, has been a cycle trader for four years. He lives in Wellampitiya and sells in the Maligawatte area. He trades in seerfish and prawns; once a week he supplies 4 kg of fish to a hotel near the St. John's Market. Highest daily sale so far Rs. 2200. His average daily profit on an income of Rs. 1800 is about Rs. 250.

Rajendra uses the Sujith FRP ice box. He has completed payment for the Rs. 2000 box in instalments. He is

happy with it despite a few quality problems with the box.

Married when he was just 15 years old, Rajendra has two children aged 4 and 4. His family has three other members his wife, her brother, and his father. He is the only earning member of the family and has no saving, apart from Rs. 10 with the St. John's co-operative. He's a director of the St. John's Fish Market. He has no land, wants to build his own house. Has studied up to Grade 7. Reads and writes in Sinhala.

K.K.D. Palitha, 33, is treasurer of the St. John's Cycle Traders Society. Has 32 customers but sells fish regularly only to about 18. Buys 20 to 25 kg of fish per day. Daily average income of Rs. 1650, highest so far being Rs. 1900. Average daily profit is Rs. 300.

Palitha has also been using the Sujith ice box over the past year. He prefers it to the galvanized box he used earlier. His ambition is to acquire a motor cycle which costs Rs. 48000.

In a nutshell, ODA-PHFP's Cycle trader assistance project is making good progress on the socio-economic front (through the associations of cycle traders and their activities). On the technology front, the project is learning from the present problems. It hopes to come up with a good-quality low-cost ice box which will help both the cycle traders and the consumers.

"I would like to think that our approach to this project is holistic and sustaining," says Mr. King.

4. *The cyclist traders are happy with what they have got. They will pedal 10 to 15 km to deliver fish to customers.*
5. *Buying fish in Negombo.*
6. *Another fish vendor at the St. John's Fish Market.*
7. *A mobile fish trader with one of his regular customers.*

BANGLADESH FISHERWOMEN

HOW CAN THEY MAKE MORE MONEY?

Text by **Shamima Nasrin Mili**

Photographs by **E. Amalore**

Women play an important role in small-scale fisheries, directly or indirectly, all over the world. In most fishing communities, men engage mainly in fish capture while women take part in a wide range of pre-harvest and post-harvest activities such as net making, fish handling, processing and marketing.

Yet fisheries is mainly regarded as a male preserve in Bangladesh. The role of women has gone largely unrecognised, undocumented and ignored. A literature search revealed that little has been done to improve women's participation in fisheries, or bring women into the mainstream of fisheries development. Thus, women in fisheries need empowerment. The status of women in fishing communities usually depends on their families' economic position and the assets owned by them. Only by contributing cash to the household, can women enjoy some decision-making power within the household.

What is the scope for economic activities by women within and outside fishing? Here is a summary.

Net-Making

A study in a fishing village revealed that **86%** of working women are involved in net-making (Banu & Mustafa, 1992:18). However, net-making is not considered a regular job and a regular source of income, because wages for net-making are very low. Fisherwomen generally make nets for their own family, for which they are not paid. But

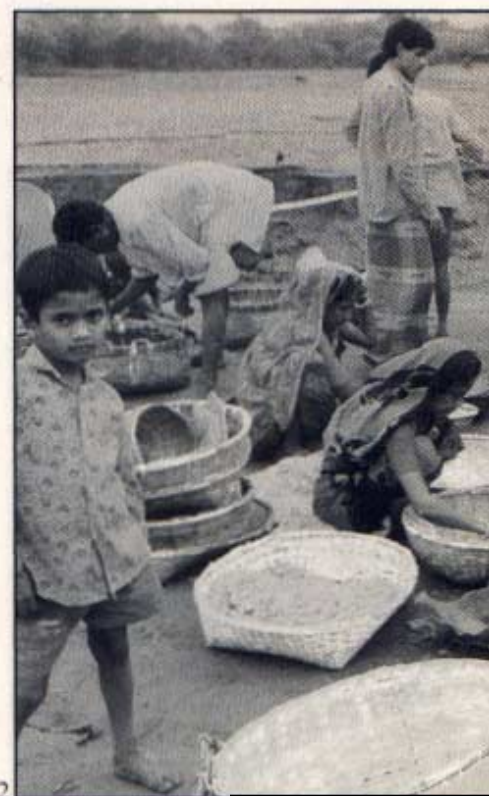
sometimes they make the nets on order for others. Twine is provided to the women for net-making. The wages for net-making vary according to area, demand and urgency, and also depend on the fishing season. During the peak season, the women get a good price for their nets; the lean season rate is lower. Now-a-days, net fabrication machines are displacing fisherwomen from their traditional net-making activity.

Fish Fry Collection

Because of extreme poverty, many poor women and girls from fishing communities now catch shrimp fry from rivers and the sea-coast. Women take part in fry-collection and fry trading either as family labour or as independent catchers. A UBINIG study found that only women from the poorest families work as fry collectors. Women with no adult male support catch fry to earn their livelihood despite cultural, social and religious taboos. Necessity forced them to go out and work like men (UBINIG 1990:10).

Fry collectors need to buy nets and some other equipment. If there is only one net in a family, it is the male who uses it. The women would use a second net if one was available. Since fry collection involves much time out of the house, women with a lot household responsibilities have no time for fry collection.

1. *Basket-making.*
2. *Sale of shrimp fry.*
3. *Mat-making.*





3



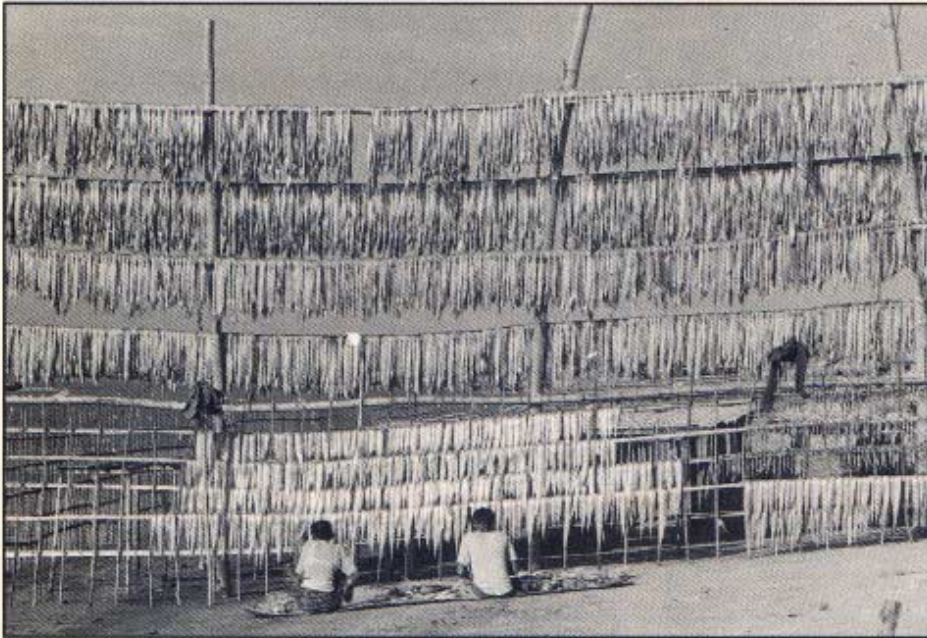
Fry sorting is another activity in which women take part. Even when the men collect fry, it's the women who do the sorting. However, fry sorting can be done in between household chores.

Preparing Supplementary Fish Meal

Women prepare supplementary fish meal for aquaculture. They usually do not sell it direct to the market but to middlemen. The women also work as paid labourers for preparing fish meal.

Handling, Preservation and Processing

Women help unload boats and nets, and sort fish. They are also normally responsible for fish processing — i.e. sun-drying, salting etc. They supplement the family labour.



In most small-scale fishing communities, when the fishermen get a good catch and this is not sold entirely in the market, women dry what is not sold. This dried fish is sold or used for the families' own consumption during the lean season. During winter, many women buy fish from landing places for sun-drying and later sell it to the traders who visit their village to buy dried fish. Or the women sell dried fish

4. *Running a petty business, like a shop.*

5. *Fish drying.*

6. *Cattle rearing.*

7. *Operating a loom.*

8. *Deft fingers at work on a stool.*



directly to consumers. In commercial fish-drying areas, women also work as paid labourers.

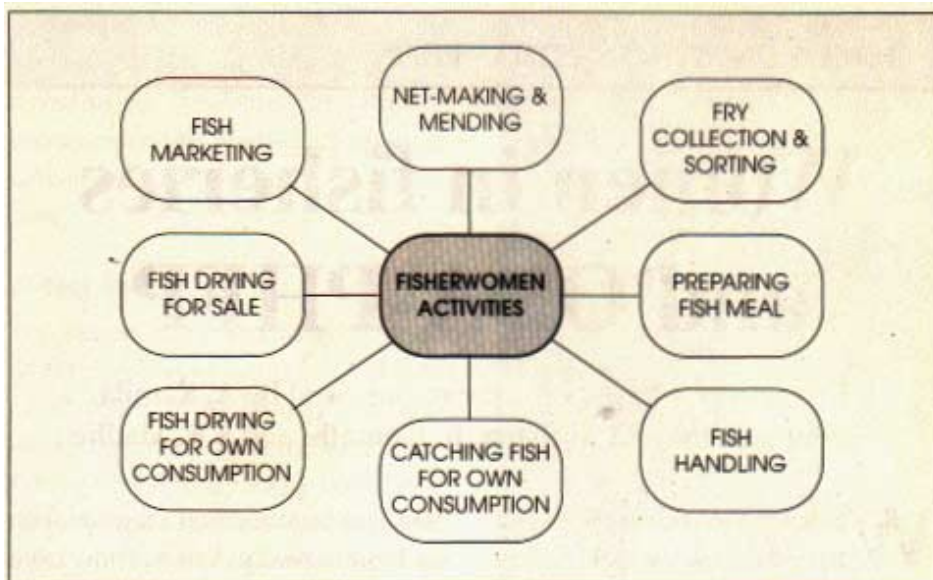
Marketing

In many places, women sell fish in their own or adjacent villages and sometimes to the market nearby. These women buy fish from landing centres and carry it on head load or by rickshaw to the nearest market. Sometimes, they sell it door to door. Most of the women fish traders are from the traditional Hindu fishing community. They are either old, divorced or separated from their husbands, or widows. Young wives are generally not allowed to sell fish.

In Bangladesh, both men and women in fishing communities, whatever their religion, regard women's participation in fish marketing as socially undesirable. However, growing poverty and unemployment have driven women to selling fish and collecting fish fry, which are not regarded as prestigious activities. Fish marketing is considered a low-status occupation for women and those engaged in this activity belong to the poorest strata of the community.

Income-Generating Opportunities Outside Fisheries

Fishing is a seasonal occupation – with periods of bounty and scarcity. Both



women and men often face long stretches of unemployment or under-employment. Rural women in an agrarian society can easily do a variety of agricultural processing jobs for income without any organisational support. But women in fishing communities do not enjoy such a benefit because they lack cultivable land in their surroundings.

Very few members of fishing communities own cultivable land. Household density is high. Activities that need space – vegetable gardening, livestock rearing or nursery – are not possible for women in coastal fishing communities. Non-fishery activities are ruled out the required skills are lacking. Cultural norms do not allow

the women to go, far from their households.

Another constraint is that women from Hindu fishing communities cannot work in neighbouring non-fishery Hindu households, as the fishing community supposedly belongs to a lower caste.

Women in coastal fishing communities try hard to make ends meet by cutting on costs. Most women spend their day collecting firewood, as fuel in their locality is scarce. They collect cow-dung, dried leaves and branches of trees, jute stalks, paddy straw etc. from different parts of the village. The girl child of the household usually helps her mother to do this. To save firewood, cooking is at times done only once a day.



Women in fisheries and ODA-PHFP

This article is based on a paper prepared by A. Kamila, with inputs from C. Mohana, B. Gomathi and S.R. Madhu

Women in fisheries in the Bay of Bengal region take part mainly in shore-based post-harvest activities such as fish handling, sorting, grading, gutting, drying, processing and marketing. They also serve as agents and auctioneers, as vendors in streets and marketplaces.

The ODA Post-Harvest Fisheries Project has introduced several technologies and socio-economic innovations to help the fisherwomen. Many of these have been introduced through select NGOs. Here is a summary.

Better fish marketing container:

ODA looked into the possibility of introducing a better fish marketing container for women traders in 1990. There were many problems with the traditional baskets fisherwomen from Tamil Nadu carried in public buses to transport fish. The containers came in different sizes and took up too much space. Besides, water oozed out from them, and the fish inside gave out a foul odour. The women fish vendors had to board the buses every day between 7.30 and 8.30 a.m., along with school going children and office-goers. Very often, the women were not permitted inside the buses with their fish baskets.

ODA, at the request of a women's NGO at Nagercoil, designed a new fish container after discussions with fisherwomen's groups. The fish

container was modified a few times on the basis of feedback. It has now been "adopted" by the government—the Department of Fisheries and the Social Welfare Board. Fisherwomen can buy the container at a subsidized rate. Those

who use this container have no problem getting into buses.

NGO Support Programme:

During the past few years, the PHFP has started addressing the needs of fisherwomen through a programme of support to NGOs. These needs include access to credit, training, and simple fish processing techniques (such as fish handling and processing, enhanced drying methods, use of ice and ice boxes, preparation of value-added products, transport etc.).

Credit:

The Project has assisted a few women's groups by enabling them to obtain bank credit. These groups, located in



Chengalpattu MGR and Nagapattinam Quid-e-Milleth districts in Tamil Nadu, are the NGOs COPDANET (Coastal Poor Development Action Network) and ROSA.

- Self-help groups have been formed at two places in this district. At other places, women have obtained assistance in cash or kind (fish containers).
- Women's groups have set up chit funds to mobilize resources and distribute them through auctions to those most in need.

These schemes have given the women access to additional credit in small amounts at low rates of interest. Caution will have to be exercised to ensure that such schemes are not appropriated by men.

Access to institutional credit by women has generated greater confidence among women both at the individual level and the sangam level.

Smoking bins:

In June 1994, the Project started a pre-pilot study in BCV Palem village, Andhra Pradesh, on producing a product named "Masmeen", using tuna. This species was landed in good quantities in Kakinada, but fetched a low price in local markets. Processor women were closely involved in the activity: they were to produce Masmeen on their own after initial demonstration.

It turned out that the production of Masmeen was not quite as attractive economically as originally envisaged. The scope of the pre-pilot study was therefore enlarged to include more varieties of smoke products. A new prototype smoking bin was designed; based on feedback from women's groups, it was modified several times. A standard commercial-size version was then designed; it was at once taken over by the women processors. They were convinced about the usefulness

of the bin; even before we pre-point phase could end, they started demanding the bins. The Project encouraged the women to apply to Government credit schemes, to buy the bins.

Drying Racks:

The Project has demonstrated the use of drying racks which could be constructed using locally available material such as wooden poles and old fishing nets. These racks enable better fish drying – it is cleaner and sand-free. Till recently, demonstrations on rack drying were held as a part of the training on better fish handling methods by NGOs in the respective areas. Santhidan in Nagercoil converted the drying racks into an additional income-generating activity in selected villages. Since anchovy landings were poor, other varieties of fish were processed using salt and rack-drying. The increase in income per 100 pieces of rainbow sardines was Rs. 30-40. Currently efforts are being made to introduce fish pickle, and to set up cold chains by getting women to use portable ice boxes to cut down on fish spoilage.

Training:

Organizing rural folk to play a more active role in their own development is important; because as individuals



Above : A woman fish vendor uses the container designed by ODA-PHFP. It ensures comfort and convenience besides being easy on the eye.

Below: Fish drying racks improve fish quality.



they lack the strength to overcome the forces that thwart development. Training is vital for this process; it has always been an important component of the ODA-PHFP.

The project's training programmes have focused on capacity-building in partner institutions, besides transfer of skills in post-harvest fisheries. The training approach is holistic, focusing as much on technology as on socio-economics and community organization.

A consultant who reviewed the project's training activities in April 1994, recommended a training unit in each partner institution, which the project could help strengthen. On the basis of this recommendation, the project has for the past two years concentrated on the training of trainers in two partner NGOs – Santhidan in Nagercoil and ROSA in Nagapattinam & both in Tamil Nadu. These trainers in turn train their communities.

Santhidan has been active for the past 10 years in developing the fishing community in Kanyakumari district. The training of trainers done here was reviewed during March 1996 in three main areas – fish handling and processing, communication skills, and participatory rural appraisal. It was found that skill levels varied widely among the trainers; the animators needed practice and more confidence to be effective as trainers. As regards PRA, the animators needed to improve their skills in carrying out field exercises.

A 10-day leadership training exercise was planned at Santhidan. A five-day session was held during August 1996, and analysed by a resource person. Twenty six animators took part in the training. The group was found to be very lively, good at role-plays. It was felt that role plays could be used more often to present basic ideas.

ROSA is a younger organization and its staff is relatively inexperienced. A

training-of-trainers programme is perhaps premature. But a review of programmes already conducted was done in March 1996 to understand the extent to which ROSA's animators had imbibed knowledge and skills. ROSA was found to have successfully built up a team of trainers. The young women there are enthusiastic about development activities. The three-day gender training provided at ROSA during October 1996 generated enormous interest among the animators, who planned a three-month programme for the community. The

animators' ability to listen to people is an asset that ROSA uses effectively.

Tricycles to market fish at Periakuppam:

At Periakuppam fishing village (near Mahabalipuram in Chengleput district, Tamil Nadu), a tricycle funded by ODA-PHFP could be a boon to fish marketing women and the entire fisherfolk community, provided some operational problems are solved.

Normally, the women walk 4-5 km under a blazing sun to catch public

Fish smoking bin in Kakinada.



buses, carrying headloads of fish that weigh as much as 35kg. Result Physical strain, chest and back pain, fish spoilage, inconvenient bus rides, and loss of money if the bus is missed. The tricycle alleviated hardship, saved time and effort and perhaps raised incomes.

How did a tricycle come to Periakuppam? ODA-PHFP has been active here for about a year, supporting the NGO COPDANET, which trains women, and runs credit and savings schemes. The women requested a tricycle. ODA-PHFP made funds available through COPDANET. After some initial reservations, the menfolk accepted the idea of a tricycle being operated by the women's sangam for fish marketing. They wanted the tricycle to meet other transport needs as well, of both men and women.

The tricycle has been a multi-purpose convenience. It has saved lives on a few occasions by rushing people injured or critically ill to hospital. It takes children to school. It transports not only fish, but also vegetables and groceries and cement for building construction. Some problems the women have faced with the tricycle :-

- Initial hostility and interference from men. This problem has been solved diplomatically — by co-opting some men into the management committee at Periakuppam.
- The NGO regarded men as more capable than women of managing the tricycle. This attitude led to some conflicts between men and women of the village over the tricycle.
- Engine trouble handicapped operations occasionally. The project held some training sessions on engine mechanism and on trouble shooting.
- A local driver is difficult to find in this fishing village. Young men from



Motorized tricycles made available by the project have proved popular.

the fishing community are reluctant to serve as drivers. Therefore a male driver willing to live in Periakuppam has to be hired from outside the fishing village. He does not stay on in the job; home beckons every now and then. There has been a heavy turn-over of drivers; this has affected fish marketing.

A young fisherman has agreed to drive the tricycle and undergo driver training.

But at the time of writing (January 1997), the busy prawn season is on, catches have been good, and the driver-to-be finds it more paying to fish for prawns.

The tricycle has been a great help to women vendors, and useful during emergencies as well. But unless the driver problem is solved, the tricycle will remain a symbol of potential rather than performance.

The project believes in forming and strengthening women's groups: this makes possible thrift and savings schemes, debate and discussion, united action.



The invisible struggle

by CHANDRIKA SHARMA

International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)

Vending is not recognised as a profession, and since vendors form part of the 'informal sector', they can claim few rights. Women in this trade face more problems than their male counterparts. They are not dismissed as domestic workers or housewives. Their role in the sustenance and survival of the fish trade is not acknowledged. Besides all this, they face harassment, sexual and otherwise, problems in transporting their loads and lack of facilities. Chandrika Sharma outlines the steps taken at a recent conference to improve the plight of these women.

ALL of us interact with vendors selling vegetables, fruits, fish, clothes, mats, brooms, toys and other items of daily use on a regular basis. We see them, buy from them, yet we know little about them or their lives. Few of us know that vending is not recognised as a profession and that vendors can claim few rights, operating as they do within the 'informal sector.'

Similarly, we know little about the daily struggle and lives of women fish vendors, discriminated against not only as women, but also as vendors and as members of economically backward fishing communities often ostracised by the 'higher castes.' With the specific purpose of discussing their problems

and the need for policy support for these women, representatives of the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF) and of non-governmental organisations from Maharashtra, Kerala and Tamil Nadu met in Mumbai recently. Also present were representatives of SEWA, an organisation that has taken the lead in working towards a national policy for vendors.

Census records and surveys of fishing communities rarely acknowledge the presence of women vendors. Often labelled as domestic workers or housewives, there is near myopia on the crucial economic and social roles played by them, which contribute significantly towards the sustenance

and survival of fishing communities. This is apparent in the fact that schemes to benefit the 'fishing community' are aimed primarily at fishermen and at fish harvesting activities.

"We have to worry not only about feeding our children and families; often other expenses, such as repaying loans taken by our husbands and providing money for their liquor, are also met by us," said Ariamuthu, of Rosa, an organisation based in Porayar District, Tamil Nadu. Women selling fish on the roadside and at market places continue to struggle against all odds against a range of problems, to support themselves and their families.

In most areas they are not allowed on public transport. Village committees in Tamil Nadu, for instance, do not allow



women to transport fish in buses. The caste factor comes into play as "upper class" bus drivers often object to transporting women fish vendors. To avail of public transport, women often have to resort to bribing bus drivers and conductors. According to Gracy from the Programme for Community Organisation (PCO), Trivandrum, even in Kerala, where women have waged a successful struggle for access to public transport, the facilities provided by the Government are grossly inadequate. They are still forced to hire commercial vehicles at considerable expense.

In parts of Maharashtra, where train compartments have been reserved for women vendors as a result of their struggles, facilities like racks for fish baskets are not available. Women pay heavily for their passes yet are harassed by railway police. Their compartments are often occupied by other passengers.

The sheer physical discomfort and stress of having to walk long distances to markets and landing centres with heavy loads is only one dimension of the problem. Other economic and social dimensions are rarely taken into consideration. Since male vendors usually have access to some form of transport such as cycles, they are able to reach markets much faster and reserve the best spaces for themselves, so that they get better prices.

Moreover, at auction centres, prices are usually high between 5 a.m. and 9 a.m., after which they decline. Male vendors are often able to take advantage of this fall in prices and still reach the local markets earlier or at the same time as the women. Their profit margins are consequently higher.

This apart, women are often forced to spend the night at harbours and landing centres since the catch arrives early in the morning when it is difficult for women to walk the distance. Since shelter and other facilities are rarely available at landing centres, women are frequently exposed to sexual and other forms of harassment by rowdies. The police accuse them of loitering and demand fines and bribes. Rowdies in the wholesale fish markets of Kerala often steal from women vendors.



Further, the fact that women spend so much time on travel keeps them away from their household chores. Much of the time they have to put up with abuse and accusations of negligence from other members of the household.

Women vendors also have to put up with harassment and extortion by auction agents at landing centres. Along with high auction charges, fish prices are fixed at artificially high levels. To make matters worse, auction agents usually appropriate the better fish from the women after the auction. In addition, few agents are willing to extend credit. For women, with few assets and other credit facilities, this often means procuring loans at high rates of interest. Bank loans for women fishworkers are either not available or too cumbersome to access.

They also find it difficult to procure ice to preserve the fish. Where fish cooperatives exist they make provisions for the supply of ice to members. However as Poornima from Shramik Sadhana, Maharashtra, pointed out, women are rarely members of such cooperatives, usually because their membership is not acceptable.

While women vending at roadsides are subject to continuous harassment by the police and by corporation authorities, those who operate in markets and pay market tax are hardly better off. Where markets are leased but, the market tax is usually on the higher side, based on inflated estimates of the fish to be sold. In Kerala, for instance, while the rate fixed by the Government is approximately Rs. 3, as much as Rs. 10 to 15 is charged. Though



market taxes are high, few facilities are available in markets to meet the needs of women fish vendors.

Shelter, drinking water and toilet facilities are rarely available. Moreover, markets lack waste disposal facilities, so that women fish vendors are often seen as dirty and are ostracised by others in the market place. Their presence is often regarded as objectionable by other occupants of the market. In Pettah near Trivandrum, even though women fish vendors pay the same amount of market tax as other vendors, they are not allotted stalls or provided with facilities available to others. Women vendors also face harassment by headload union workers operating in markets. In Kerala, if women do not allow head load workers to carry their fish baskets, they are physically molested.

At the same time, as Nalini Nayak of the NFF pointed out, it is also necessary to view the struggles of these women against the larger backdrop of developments threatening the survival of artisanal fishing communities. The proliferation of "modern and efficient" technology has facilitated overfishing. Fish resources Off mainland India,

especially in the nearshore coastal waters, are over-exploited. Pollution due to industrial and other human activities is destroying fishery habitats. As a consequence, along many parts of the coast the duration of fishing trips is increasing, as fishers are forced to venture further to find fish. Fish landings are not regular and women have to go to distant landing centres, or pay more, to procure fish.

At the same time, recent changes in macro-economic policy and a greater emphasis on exports as a source of foreign exchange are further threatening to erode the access of fishing communities and of women processors to fish resources. Both local food security and the livelihood of fishworkers dependent on the processing and marketing of fish is likely to be affected. Similarly, the anarchic growth of other sectors, such as tourism, has increased competition for space, so that fishing villages, landing centres and markets are often displaced and relocated.

Though millions of women and men in the country support themselves through vending, vending is not recognised as a profession. There is

little policy support. As a consequence men and women vendors continue to struggle, unnoticed and unheard. The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), based in Ahmedabad, has taken the lead in lobbying for the adoption of a national policy for vendors. It is in the process of formulating a draft policy, part of which is a census of vendors in selected Cities.

The Mumbai meeting endorsed the need for such a policy and agreed that basic rights of vendors should include: right to vending space; right to legal status for vendors, whether through a permit, license or identity card; right to travel on public transport, where special provision should be made for goods; representation in city and municipal councils and on planning boards and a right to representation when summoned.

It also stressed that census surveys should recognise vending as a profession, and record the number of men and women involved on a part time or full-time basis. Only then can the dimensions of the profession and the need for policy support be appreciated.

At the same time there is a need to respond to the unique and specific problems of women fish vendors. Demands of women fish workers include: recognise women of fishing communities as fishworkers in their own right; provide basic facilities, such as drinking water, in fishing villages; provide facilities in markets, such as toilets, drinking water and waste disposal; provide special shelters for women at landing centres, near harbours; implement the Coastal Zone Notification and other legislation for environmental protection, which will improve the quality of coastal waters and increase the productivity of local fisheries; and, make available a list of species that can and cannot be exported.

Courtesy : The Hindu

