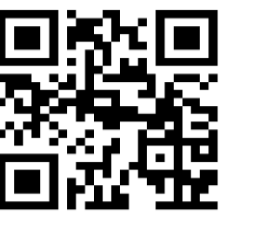


EMPOWERING WOMEN IN SRI LANKAN FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE: UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

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Introduction

The economic and food security of Sri Lanka depend significantly on the island nation's aquaculture sector, yet more is needed about the role that women play in this sector. This study highlights the opportunities, challenges, and substantial economic contributions made by women as it examines the complex dynamics of gender involvement in Sri Lankan fisheries and aquaculture. Utilizing an all-encompassing examination of socio-economic variables, cultural standards, and legislative structures, it illuminates the diverse roles that women assume across the aquaculture value chain. Several case studies show the empowerment routes, barriers, and tactics used by women to be involved in this male-dominated sector. Moreover, the emphasis on stakeholder input in Sri Lanka's legal system may open opportunities for women to participate in decision-making. According to data from 2022, women in Sri Lanka make up approximately 7% of the 275,046 workers in the country's marine fishing sector, accounting for 32.92% of the labour force. Women make up 5% of the labour in inland capture and culture fisheries, in contrast (Yadava and Mukherjee, 2016). The fisherwomen showed a greater propensity to voluntarily participate in training programs run by non-governmental organisations (NGO) and state organisations (National Aquaculture Development Authority of Sri Lanka (NAQDA)) in order to obtain a practical understanding of value addition and innovative post-harvest techniques. These outreach programs gave them new skill sets, such as decorative fish aquaculture, which inspired them to start their own businesses in the future (Table 1). Approximately 30 per cent of the estimated 2,500 individuals involved in the breeding and production of ornamental fish are women. Moreover, in the shrimp aquaculture industry, women make up about 5% of the workforce (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2013).

TABLE 1: Outreaches to encourage women in the fisheries and aquaculture sector.

Organization	Skill development
Sevalanka Foundation	Drying, preserving, and processing fish in communities (Herath and Radampola, 2017).
SEED initiative	Processing and postharvest production of fish (Herath and Radampola, 2017).
NAQDA	Ornamental fish breeding, ornamental fish farming, disease diagnosis and fish health management, ornamental fish feed and nutrition, propagation, and cultivation of ornamental aquatic plants (Herath and Radampola, 2017).



Figure 1: Women drying small fish in Negambo, Sri Lanka (Yadava and Mukherjee, 2016).

Importance of Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture

• Social Impact:

Participation of women promotes family welfare and community resilience.

e.g. The seaweed industry

- female farmers well-suited jobs that they could balance with their domestic duties to escalate their family income (Sultana et al., 2023; (Hoque and Tahosin, 2023).

• Economic Contribution:

Women work in an array of categories, including marketing, processing, and fishing (Silva, 2018; Nishanthan et al., 2019; Nilakshana et al., 2021).

They support local economies and household incomes (Wu, 2015; Nilakshana et al., 2021).



Figure 2: Women actively involving in fry-to fingerling rearing facility (Silva, 2015)

Challenges Faced by Women

- **Economic Barriers:**
 - Restricted availability of resources and finances (Basnayake et al., 2018).
 - Imbalances in the distribution of income.
- **Social and Cultural Barriers (Wu, 2015; Silva, 2018):**
 - Gender-based discrimination and limited decision-making power.
 - Cultural conventions that limit women's ability to play particular roles in power.
- **Education and Skill Gaps (Wu, 2015):**
 - Community Programs: Establish community organisations and support mechanisms.
 - Awareness Campaigns: Emphasize the efforts of women and gender equality.
- **Policy and Institutional Barriers:**
 - Inclusive Policies: Promote legislation that caters to the unique requirements of women and encourages their participation.
 - Institutional Support: enhance the institutional support that women in aquaculture and fisheries obtain.

Strategies for Empowerment

- **Economic Empowerment:**
 - Microcredit Programs: Make loans and other financial services easily available (Buang et al., 2015).
 - Market Access: Create strategies that promote fair pricing and accessibility to markets.
- **Education and Training:**
 - Community Programs: Provide instructions on current fishing methods and aquaculture procedures.
 - Leadership Training: Provide women with leadership and management development opportunities.
- **Social Support:**
 - Community Programs: Establish community organisations and support mechanisms (Yadava and Mukherjee, 2016; Wu, 2015) e.g. Shrimp Farm Association for Women
 - Awareness Campaigns: Emphasize the efforts of women and gender equality (Wu, 2015).
- **Policy Recommendations:**
 - Inclusive Policies: Promote legislation that caters to the unique requirements of women and encourages their participation.
 - Institutional Support: enhance the institutional support that women in aquaculture and fisheries obtain.



Figure 3: Women trained to culture oysters (DeJager et al., 2014)

Recommendations for Future Action

- Collaboration: Fortify partnership agreements among local communities, NGOs, and the government.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: Install reliable methods to monitor impact and progress.
- Scaling up: replicate and modify effective models to fit different circumstances.
- Expansion of fisheries education for basic levels such as education of fisherwomen needs to be improved (Herath and Radampola, 2017).
- To reap the advantage of the exceptional potential in the blue economy, gender empowerment efforts on the development of hard and soft skills were determined to be necessary (Silva, 2018).
- Raise knowledge about how to encourage their entrepreneurial talents and provide them with the support and resources they need. In this way, they may gain a larger portion of the market by taking advantage of the middlemen's minor advantages (Silva, 2018).

References :

