

# ***Women in Fisheries Extension: Challenges and Opportunities***

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## **ABSTRACT**

Women play a vital role in the fisheries sector, contributing significantly to various stages of the industry, from harvesting to processing and marketing. Their involvement has a positive socio-economic impact, promoting sustainable practices and community development. Women in fisheries extension face numerous challenges that hinder their participation and empowerment. Key challenges include limited access to resources, social and cultural barriers, lack of representation, inadequate training and education, workload, and time constraints. These challenges affect women's ability to participate in and benefit from fisheries extension services, ultimately impacting their livelihoods and the sustainability of fisheries resources. Addressing these challenges is crucial to promoting gender equality and empowering women in the fisheries sector. Women in fisheries extension face numerous opportunities that can empower them and enhance their participation in the sector. Some of these opportunities include leadership roles, entrepreneurship, sustainable practices and conservation, capacity building and training, networking and support, Aquaculture: Women can engage in aquaculture. Access to resources Inclusive Policies: Women can benefit from gender-responsive policies that address inequalities and promote equal opportunities in fisheries. By leveraging these opportunities, women in fisheries extension can enhance their

participation, empowerment, and contributions to the sector, ultimately promoting sustainable fisheries management and community development. Gender mainstreaming in fisheries development aims to promote equal opportunities and address inequalities faced by women in the sector.

## INTRODUCTION

Fisheries extension is the process of offering assistance, direction, and services to fishermen, fish farmers, and other fisheries industry stakeholders. The ultimate goal is to increase productivity, sustainability, and livelihoods by improving their knowledge, abilities, and practices.

Women play a vital role from harvesting to processing and marketing; women make substantial contributions to many aspects of the fisheries industry. Their participation fosters community development and sustainable practices, which has a positive socioeconomic impact. However, there are obstacles that prevent women from fully participating and becoming empowered in the fishing industry (Gopal et al., 2020). Despite working throughout the aquaculture value chain, women's opportunities have not kept pace with the growth of the industry. In actuality, many opportunities have decreased as a result of current growth strategies. Women are more prevalent in value addition, marketing, sales, small-scale production, and post-harvest industrial and artisanal processing. Women are frequently displaced or forced into the lowest-paying, lowest-quality jobs as aquaculture grows and expands. Women make up a small percentage of senior employees, owners, managers, and executives in larger companies (Kusakabe, 2022).

Gender mainstreaming in fisheries development aims to promote equal opportunities and address inequalities encountered by females in the field. Women's roles in fisheries are diverse, ranging from

fishing and processing to marketing and management. However, they often face challenges in accessing resources, participating in decision-making, and benefiting from fisheries development.

### Key Aspects of Women's Participation:

- I. **Making Decisions:** Women taking part in decision-making can result in more equitable and sustainable fisheries management. For instance, a study in the Brazilian Amazon discovered that women's participation in managing arapaima fisheries led to a 77% increase in their income.
- II. **Leadership Positions:** Women are capable of holding leadership roles in fisheries administration, policy formulation, and community development, whereby they can be involved in decision-making.
- III. **Entrepreneurship:** Women are able to open their own fish-related enterprises, fostering livelihood and economic empowerment.
- IV. **Sustainable Practices:** Women may make inputs to fisheries research, monitoring, and conservation efforts, promoting responsible practices and environmental protection.

Various schemes look to empower women in fisheries extension, improving their livelihoods and encouraging sustainable trends. These include some of the following programs:

## Government Schemes

- I. **Intensive Fish Farming Scheme:** The Uttar Pradesh government offers subsidies to women intensive fish farmers, providing a 50% subsidy for OBC and general women and 60% for SC women.
- II. **Interest-free loans:** The government provides interest-free loans to fisherwomen for their economic empowerment.
- III. **Group Insurance Scheme:** A group insurance scheme, involving pension schemes, is provided to assist fisherwomen.

## Capacity Building and Training

- I. **NFDB Sponsored Training:** The National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) sponsors training in fish processing and value addition to upgrade the skills and livelihoods of local fisherwomen.
- II. **AQUAFIN:** Aquaculture Technology & Research Foundation India offers capacity-building schemes to transfer the technologies in fisheries and aquaculture to empower women in the field.
- III. **Jaljeevika:** Jaljeevika empowers Indian women farmers through fisheries, which leads to their elevation in socio-economic status and sustainable practices.

## Women Empowerment Programs

- I. **Society for Assistance to Fisherwomen (SAF):** SAF enforces programs to improve fisherwomen's livelihoods, such as the Joint Liability Group (JLG) project and the Theeramythri project, encouraging microenterprises and financial empowerment.
- II. **Fishermen Community Development Programme (FCDP):** FCDP carries out

training and workshops to raise awareness and empower women in fisheries.

## Other Initiatives

- I. **Women SHGs:** Organizations facilitate women self-help groups (SHGs) in availing startup schemes and advancing entrepreneurship and economic empowerment among fishers.
- II. **Cluster Development:** Initiatives aim to develop clusters to avail startup schemes for improving productivity and livelihoods of women fishers.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### CHALLENGES

Many obstacles prevent women from participating and being empowered in fisheries extension. Important difficulties include:

- I. **Restricted Resource Access:** Women frequently do not have access to technology, credit, or other necessary resources.
- II. **Social and Cultural Barriers:** Social norms and traditional gender roles make it hard for women to be involved in managing fisheries and making decisions about them. Women are underrepresented in bodies that govern and make policies pertaining to fisheries.
- III. **Insufficient Education and Training:** Women's capacity to engage effectively is hampered by a lack of training and skill-development opportunities.
- IV. **Workload and Time Constraints:** Women frequently shoulder a heavy workload, which includes caregiving and household duties, leaving little time for activities related to fishing.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Women in fisheries extension have several opportunities that can empower them and increase their engagement in the field. Some of these opportunities are

- I. **Leadership:** Women can assume leadership roles in fisheries administration, policy-making, and community development, allowing them to shape decision-making.
- I. **Entrepreneurship:** Women can create their own business enterprises related to fish, like seafood restaurants, fish farms, or processing plants, for economic empowerment and livelihood.
- II. **Conservation and Sustainable Practices:** Women can be involved in fisheries research, surveillance, and conservation, promoting sustainable practices and nature conservation.
- III. **Training and Capacity Building:** Women can be supported through skills improvement programs, technical training, and entrepreneurship development, leading to productivity and income increase.
- IV. **Support and Networking:** Women can join networks and support systems, promoting knowledge sharing, mentorship, and collaboration.
- V. **Aquaculture:** Aquaculture provides a more organized setting where women can balance family duties with work.
- VI. **Access to Resources:** Women can access initiatives that allow them access to credit, technology, and business development services for economic empowerment.

## CONCLUSION

Women are vital contributors to the fisheries sector, actively engaged across the value chain—from harvesting and processing to marketing and management. Their involvement promotes community development, fishery sustainability, and household incomes. Nevertheless, despite their vital roles, women still encounter many obstacles, such as limited decision-making authority, cultural limitations, inadequate training, and restricted access to resources. As the fisheries industry grows, the need to mainstream gender perspectives become more urgent. Without intentional efforts, women risk further marginalization, especially in higher-value and leadership roles. Empowering women through inclusive policies, targeted training, financial support, and institutional reforms can bridge the gap between their contribution and the benefits they receive.

These issues are already being addressed by a number of government programs and capacity-building initiatives. We can promote a more equitable, productive, and sustainable fisheries sector, where women not only participate but also flourish as leaders, entrepreneurs, and stewards of marine and freshwater resources, by stepping up and bolstering these initiatives and making sure women's voices are at the forefront of fisheries governance and extension services.

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