

Short Communication

Decreasing Trend in Participation of Women in Fish Marketing in Patna, Bihar (India)

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Abstract

In the fisheries sector, participation of women is generally after the fish is harvested. This may be a tradition evolved around the need for rest and relief for the men folk after long spells of hard toil in the waters. Fish retailing has been mainly a women's domain all over India, both in the inland and marine sector. Women take the twin responsibilities of fish trading and taking care of family. The Government of Bihar, India has earmarked areas for fish markets in the city of Patna, but often the space is constrained and consumers find it difficult to purchase fish from there. Many fish vendors thus occupy the pavements in different locations. This is also a cause for concern. In Patna, the proportion of women in fish markets has been decreasing over the past decade or so. The main reasons are insecurity, lack of basic facilities, literacy etc. Harassment from different quarters, such as the men retailers, administrative and the municipal authorities have been reported. In fact most women vendors accepted that lack of protection was the main problem they faced in their work. Some women fish vendors were mobile vendors because they felt that this was a safer way to ward off harassment. Apart from these issues, women have practically no technical knowledge on fish handling, preservation and pre-processing, which could be used for developing their trade.

Introduction

The state of Bihar in northern India has one of the lowest GDPs in the country. More than 70% of its population is dependent on agriculture and allied activities like aquaculture, dairy, poultry, etc. Bihar has varied aquatic resources of 3,200 km of rivers, 100,000 hectares floodplain wetlands, 9,000 hectares of oxbow lakes, 7,200 hectares of reservoirs and 69,000 hectares of ponds and

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tanks (<http://ahd.bih.nic.in/Docs/ICAR-Report-Fisheries-Dev-Bihar.pdf>. Accessed 20 December 2015). The fishermen community constitutes about 14% of the total population of Bihar. About 80% of the fish production is from capture fisheries and the rest from culture fisheries (Jha 2009).

Patna is the capital and largest city of Bihar. It is also the second largest city of Eastern India, and in 2011 had an estimated population of 1.68 million. The modern city of Patna is situated on the southern bank of the river Ganga with many of its tributaries also straddling the city. The long riverine system is a resource for fisheries. However, the fish catch in the Ganga has declined by almost 69% in a decade affecting an entire way-of-life for the fishing community in the state capital (Mirza 2004).

Fishing in the rivers is through a contract system where an individual or a cooperative society takes a lease on the right to fish in a particular stretch. Individuals further employ fishermen to do the actual fishing. The harvested fish is auctioned at the banks of the river to vendors or middlemen, who in turn sell to consumers or to fish sellers in the market. Only a few consumers bought fish from the landing centres (Honkanen et al. 1999; Sharma and Khajuria 2009).

Women are an integral part of the fisheries and they are active in processing, marketing and selling the catch, though their primary responsibility is in their roles as caregivers to the family (Kumar 2010; Olufayo 2012; Biswas and Rao 2014). There have been studies on fish markets in India especially with reference to the unorganised retail sector (Tietze 2004). There are issues of facilities available for retailing and also safety and security of the women. The present study examines the existing conditions in the fish markets of Patna, Bihar vis-à-vis women and tries to identify specific issues which are barriers to their participation in the system. An attempt is also made to provide some action and recommendations which can improve the involvement of women.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted during the post monsoon season of the year 2014. A brief survey was conducted to learn the status of markets with reference to consumers' preferences which are largely determined by the

availability of the variety of fish in the markets. Proximity to residential areas, general hygiene and other factors like prices were determinants that attracted consumers. Five sites (S1 to S5) were selected of which three were government allotted fish markets and two sites, both roadside/pavement markets, were markets operating in unauthorised places, but are very commonly seen in fish trade.

Interviews were conducted at each of the sites with the sellers as well as the consumers using a questionnaire. The participant observation method also was used for collecting first-hand information.

Results

Patna is a centre of fish import for the state of Bihar. The local production has not been able to meet the demand of consumers. The total fish production in Bihar is 280,000 tonnes against the annual requirement of about 450,000 tonnes (Jha 2009). It depends on supplies from other state, especially from the southern state of Andhra Pradesh. Generally whole fish either in live condition or in ice is preferred by the consumers and frozen fish is rarely seen, except in bigger super markets. Generally inland fish is preferred by the consumers and marine fish is rarely seen. Though a policy was formed to earmark areas for fish marketing very little attention was paid to constructing proper markets (Sathiadas and Kumar 1995). Rapid urbanisation has, however, led to increasing demand and the inability of designated markets to meet the same. The schematic representation of the fish marketing in Patna, Bihar is given in Fig. 1.

There are about ten government designated markets in Patna, but it was observed that fish sellers also retailed fish from encroached road sides and pavements inside residential areas in the city. Rather than go to designated markets, consumers preferred “closer to home” roadside/pavement markets. Women were also seen to move from place to place to sell their fish, stopping at each place for some time. From the available records it was observed that in 1994, the number of women fish sellers was more than the men but the situation has changed drastically in two decades (Table. 1). In markets where women continue to dominate, like market S2 in the study, they have been getting the help of their husbands and sons with regard to safety and security.

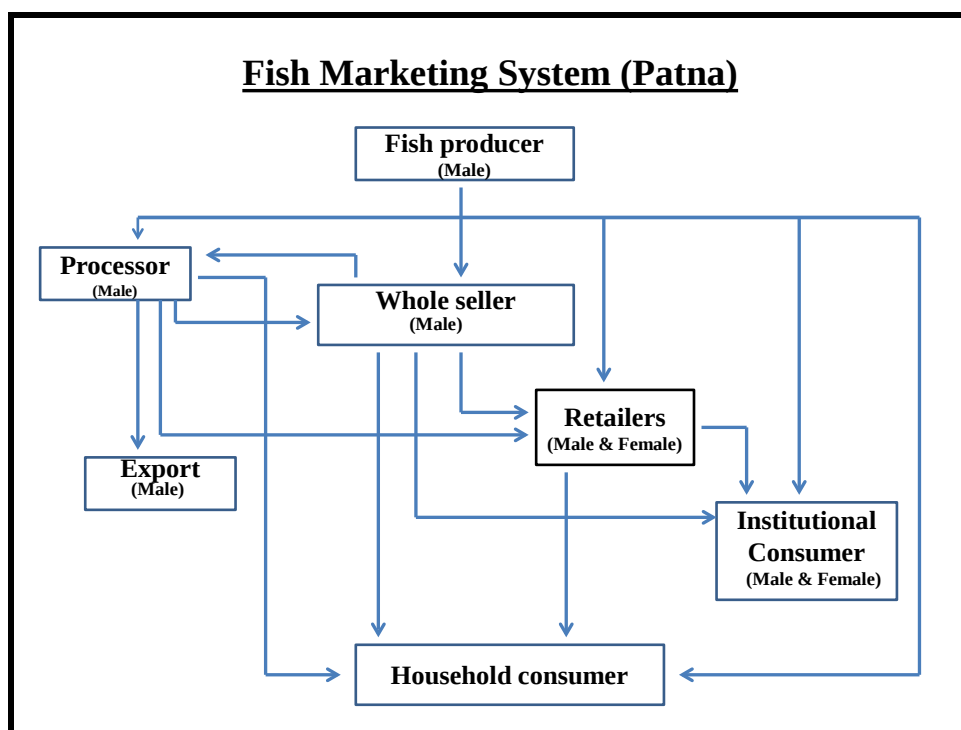


Fig. 1: Fish Marketing System (Patna)

Table. 1: Number of men and women fish vendors on different sites in Patna in the year 1994, 2004 and 2014. (S1 to S5 are the different markets selected - S1: Boring Road crossing, S2: Hartali More fish market, S3: Raza bazaar fish market, S4: Ashiana more road side, S5: Razapur bridge pavement).

Site	1994		2004		2014	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
S1	09	11	11	09	15	11
S2	03	08	04	08	04	11
S3	05	04	07	01	09	01
S4	00	04	05	06	10	08
S5	03	07	04	07	09	09

The number of men fish sellers had been continuously increasing since 1994 in comparison with women fish sellers. Though the absolute number of women fish sellers had increased the percentage of participation declined from about 61% to 47%. In 2004 the numbers of women fish sellers were much lower than 1994 and 2014. This was mainly because of safety and security issues

(Nidan 2010). Poor infrastructure, unsafe and insecure places to sell, poor personal hygiene and health, harassment from different quarters, such as the men retailers, administrative and municipal authorities etc. compel the women to move away from taking up this avocation. Even though many of the women had more than two decades of experience, the men sellers did not give the women their due in marketing space as well as believing that they were not capable enough to manage marketing aspects like fluctuating prices. That is what made the women shift to unauthorised spaces inside residential areas, which were comparatively safer. Most women fish sellers accepted that in 1994 the market was much safer and that then they had independently traded their fish in the market and had a better say in its functioning, but that conditions had changed in the ensuing two decades. Now, by 2014, most of the markets were male dominated and the overall management of markets had passed into male hands and women had to simply follow the rules laid down by them.

Discussion

Women have been reported to be more involved in post-harvest activities than men (Barman 2001; Nandeesha 2004; Nwabueze 2010) and to be important in marketing as agents, auctioneers, retail and itinerant stall holders. The women also take care of preservation of the fish that is not sold fresh. Almost all the women were either middle-aged or old and had lower socio-economic status (Felsing et al. 2000). Unmarried or young women do not get involved in marketing of fish (DFID 2003). Women having small children or those who have no other care giver support at home could not undertake fish marketing. In some cases family members lent a helping hand in the fish markets. In general, the participation of women has been declining. The main reason was that they were afraid of the harassment they faced from different quarters. Mobility in vending activity was a way to ward off harassment. Moreover the women were reluctant to sit in a market place because most of the other vendors were men (Nidan 2010). A majority of women vendors stated that lack of protection was the main problem they faced in their work place. Lack of basic facilities such as toilets and drinking water etc. are also affecting the participation of women (Mugaonkar et al. 2011; Suddhawati 2013). Some indirect factors were also noticed for the fall in participation of women like the influx of more fishermen in retailing activity.

A local fisherman remarked that: *Fishing in Patna, which provided livelihood to thousands and was regarded to be the backbone of freshwater fishing, is no more the lucrative business that it used to be a decade ago. Fish trading work is regular and has fixed timings unlike going for fishing.*

Conclusion

Patna is an old and fast growing urban area. Fish is a priced food item here. Though women of the fishing community of Patna are more literate than those in other places of the state Bihar (India), their participation in marketing activities has been declining for the last two decades. Safety and security issues can be mitigated if properly designed markets are constructed with adequate facilities for women to ply their trade without fear of exploitation and harassment.

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