



Fisherwomen's Perception on the Constraints Hampering their Empowerment and Development: A Case Study of the Self Help Groups of Thoothukudi District, Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Marine fisheries constitute a valuable source of food and employment, and a net contributor to the nation's balance of payment. The fisherwomen have been facing several constraints of technical, financial, organizational and policy realms, which affects their social and economic empowerment. In this regard, around 40 fisherwomen from Self Help Groups (SHGs) of Tharuvaikulam fishing village in Thoothukudi district (Tamil Nadu) was selected randomly for data collection. The fisherwomen were asked to rank the constraints according to their perception of importance. Garrett Ranking Technique was used to analyze the constraints in order to find out the most significant factor which influences the respondent. This technique helps to precisely rank the preference of the respondents on different factors. Of the seven production constraints, high cost of inputs including finfish and shellfish was ranked foremost. Of the five financial constraints, lack of funds for starting and running the business activities was the major constraint. Among the five constraints that influenced cohesion of the SHGs, the respondents opined that lack of leadership and guidance affected the performance of the SHGs. Lack of marketing skills was the single most important marketing constraint. With regard to performance constraints, lesser profits brought down their performance. Further, lack of contact between producer and consumer was identified as the most important constraint, among six extension constraints, that affected market access. Among the seven entrepreneurship constraints, lack of lateral

thinking and innovation denied them success in their business.

Keywords: Microfinance, fisherwomen SHGs, production and marketing constraints

Introduction

Fisheries is a sunrise sector contributing 0.7% to the Tamil Nadu GDP at current prices in 2014-15 (Fisheries Policy Note, 2015-16). Fish production in the State was 6.97 lakh tonnes in 2014-15. Tamil Nadu is a major producer of fish in the country and ensures food and nutritional security of the protein-starved people who eat predominantly rice, particularly where it matters the most, the rural populace. Further, it provides livelihood to 9.15 lakh fisher folk who make-out a living from fisheries. Exports of fish and fishery products earned Rs. 5,308.17 crores worth of foreign exchange to the State exchequer in 2014-15.

The marine fishery is largely unregulated, open access fishery, except for the 45 days ban imposed on the trawlers during April - May every year. Other regulatory measures such as time zoning, minimum mesh size at the codend, ban on pair trawling, purse seining and on catching endangered species remain more in books than in reality reflecting the scant respect the fisherfolk have for the regulatory measures. Enforcement is almost absent. Gill netting a passive fishing gear unlike the trawl which is an active fishing method. The fisherfolk in Tharuvaikulam use wooden boats with inboard engine and use gillnets for pelagic fishes and longlines for tuna. This method has enabled them harvest marine fish profitably and the investment is also less relative to that of trawler.

Self Help Groups (SHGs) have been promoted as a vehicle of women empowerment covering social,

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economic, cultural and political dimensions. These SHGs undertake small economic enterprises to supplement family income as well as for availing benefits provided by the government to the SHGs. Earlier studies on fisherwomen SHGs have shown that the SHGs are functioning extremely well with very prompt repayment of the microfinance availed from the banks (Jayaraman, 2000, 2002, 2005 and 2008; Tietze & Villareal, 2003; Vipinkumar et al., 2012; 2013). The present study focused on the constraints the fisherwomen faced with emphasis on entrepreneurship and marketing aspects.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Tharuvaikulam village in Thoothukudi district, a major marine fish landing centre in Tamil Nadu. A sample of 40 fisherwomen belonging to the SHGs in the village was selected randomly and the required data were collected using a pre-tested interview schedule in 2013. The fisherwomen were asked to rank the constraints they had faced according to their perception of importance.

Garret Ranking Technique (Garrett & Woodworth, 1969) was used to analyze the production, marketing, finance, extension, performance and entrepreneurship constraints perceived by the fisherwomen. The respondents were asked to rank the reasons in the order of importance and these ranks were converted into percent position by using the following formula:

$$\text{Percent position} = \frac{100 (R_{ij} - 0.05)}{N_{ij}}$$

where,

R_{ij} is the rank given for i^{th} item by j^{th} individual

N_{ij} is the number of items ranked by the j^{th} individual

The percent position of each rank was converted into scores using Garrett's Table. For each constraint, scores of individual respondents were added together and were divided by total number of respondents for whom scores were added. Thus, mean score for each constraint was ranked by arranging them in descending order of importance.

Thus inferential statistics was drawn using percentage analysis and the Garrett ranking technique.

Results and Discussion

The data on various constraints reported by the fisherwomen SHG members in the establishment and operation of micro enterprises with focus on the marketing of their produces in the study area were collected and analysed using the Garret Ranking Technique. The results of the analysis are presented and discussed below.

Seven production constraints were identified by the respondents and among them, high cost of inputs for finfish and shellfish, was ranked first with a mean score of 70 (Table 1).

Table 1. Production constraints

Constraints	Mean score	Rank
High cost of the inputs including finfish and shellfish	70	I
Lack of adequate supply of finfish / shellfish	59	II
High transportation cost	53	III
Production of similar or homologous products from other SHGs in the same location	47	IV
Lack of adequate knowledge about the enterprise	41	V
Lack of insurance coverage	31	VI
Lack of adequate supply of other inputs	10	VII

This finding concurs with Jayavaradhan et al. (2012) and Subhadra et al. (2009) who reported high cost of feed as a prime constraint. Lack of adequate supply of finfish/shellfish (raw material), high transportation cost, production of similar or homologous products from other SHGs in the same location, lack of adequate knowledge about the enterprise, lack of insurance coverage and lack of adequate supply of other inputs were the other constraints in that order of importance.

The fisherwomen generally agree that finance is always a major hurdle in their economic empowerment. They identified five financial constraints (Table 2). They reported that lack of funds for starting and operating the business activities was the prime financial constraint with a mean score of 62. The other financial constraints were inordinate delay in obtaining loan from banks, declining profits

and business sustainability, high interest rate for the loan and inadequate support from the bank officials. These results concur with the findings of earlier studies by Kokate et al. (1988), Yadav et al. (1995), Jithendran et al. (1998) who reported lack of funds as a major constraint.

Table 2. Financial constraints

Constraints	Mean score	Rank
Lack of funds	62	I
Inordinate delay in obtaining loan from banks	55	II
Declining profits and business sustainability	43	III
High interest rate for the loan	37	IV
Inadequate support from the bank officials	18	V

The successful functioning of the SHGs depend to a large extent on the cohesion of the SHGs. Often it influences their performance. The respondents perceived lack of leadership and guidance affected the performance of the SHGs including their business activities. This constraint got a mean score of 69 (Table 3). Lack of federation for the SHGs, lack of encouragement from fellow members, lack of leadership and guidance and reduction in membership strengths due to marriage and relocation, etc. were ranked successively. These findings concur with those of the earlier studies of Jayalakshmi (2001), Lina et al. (2008), Mehta (1999) and Sarada (2001) who had mentioned about reduced group orientation and cohesion.

Succeeding the credit constraints, all producers, be it farmers, fish farmers or fisherfolk, reported access to markets and marketing hurdles as their major problems. Concurrently, the fisherwomen in this study have also reported lack of marketing skills as the single most important marketing constraint which received a mean score of 82 (Table 4).

The other marketing constraints reported are lack of adequate price for the products, high marketing cost, high packaging cost, exploitation by middlemen and lack of remunerative price, un-organised producers in marketing similar products, distant markets, competition among fellow SHGs in the same village, lack of government support in

Table 3. Cohesion of the SHGs

Constraints	Mean score	Rank
Lack of leadership and guidance	69	I
Lack of federation for the SHGs	58	II
Lack of encouragement from fellow members	50	III
Lack of support from other SHG members	40	IV
Reduction in membership strengths due to marriage, relocation, etc.	24	V

Table 4. Marketing constraints

Constraints	Mean score	Rank
Lack of marketing skills	82	I
Lack of adequate price for the products	76	II
High marketing cost	68	III
High packaging cost	64	IV
Middlemen not providing remunerative price	58	V
Unorganised producers in marketing similar products	56	VI
Distant markets	52	VII
Competition among fellow SHGs in the same village	48	VIII
Lack of government support in marketing the products	44	IX
Lack of consumer support	41	X
Lack of quality	36	XI
Lack of advertisement	33	XII
High quality control testing charge	25	XIII
Lack of marketing infrastructure	20	XIV

marketing the products, lack of consumer support, lack of quality, lack of advertisement, high quality control testing charges and lack of marketing infrastructure.

In agriculture, farmers have been complaining that the cost of production of farm products like rice has been increasing at alarming levels while the price of the product has not risen proportionately. They lament that farming has become a less profitable venture. The fisherwomen also feel the similar way

which was revealed from the second constraint, i.e., lack of adequate price. High marketing costs could prove to be disastrous in the long run which could in turn make a business unviable. The respondents felt that this is a serious problem for them too. Similarly, another relevant problem is high packaging cost. Though fisherwomen are organized as SHGs, they lack linkage with organized market institutions. Generally, they have to reach out to the consumers through middlemen who charge a high commission for linking them with the consumers.

Products developed by SHGs do not enjoy wide consumer acceptance as compared to those products marketed by established manufacturers. Popular brands command a high price in the market because the consumers perceive them to be of high quality. The SHGs have not been very successful in creating a brand name for their products. Non-compliance to the quality standards and certification constrained the fishermen in marketing their products effectively. Kokate et al. (1988), Yadhav et al. (1995), Jithendran et al. (1998), Jha (2002), Mishra (1999), Meganathan (2010 & 2011) and Singh (2000) also reported similar findings among dairy and livestock products.

The performance of an organization depends on several factors. The fisherwomen opined that the lag in their business activities was due to the less profit which subsequently brought down their performance as well. This constraint received a mean score of 75 (Table 5).

Table 5. Performance constraints

Constraints	Mean score	Rank
Less profits	75	I
Difficulty in scaling up the business	70	II
Difficulty in linking with marketing agencies	65	III
Lack of fair price for the products	59	IV
Lack of marketing information	56	V
Lack of marketing support from government institutions	51	VI
Lack of funds	46	VII
Lack of mobility	42	VIII
Family ties	35	IX
Lack of time	29	X
Lack of education	19	XI

This was followed by the other constraints *viz.*, difficulty in scaling up the business, difficulty in linking with marketing agencies, lack of fair price for the products, lack of marketing information, lack of marketing support from government offices, lack of funds, lack of mobility, family ties, lack of time and lack of education. Rao (1999), Tatti (1999), Reji (2002) and Anand (2004) also found similar results.

Lack of linkage between producer and consumer was perceived as the chief constraint that affected market access. This factor has been given a mean score of 69 (Table 6). This constraint was followed by another similar constraint, lack of linkage between producer and marketing agency, which got a mean score of 62.

Table 6. Extension constraints

Constraints	Mean score	Rank
Lack of linkage between producer and consumer	69	I
Lack of linkage between producer and marketing agency	62	II
Lack of contact between producer and educational and research institutions	52	III
Lack of adequate training in the production of the products	46	IV
Lack of contact with NGOs	40	V
Lack of extension educational programmes for SHG women	30	VI

The other constraints are lack of contact between producers and educational and research institutes, lack of adequate training in the production process, lack of contact with NGOs and lack of extension educational programmes for the SHG women.

Among the entrepreneurship constraints, lack of lateral thinking and innovation inhibited success in their business. This constraint obtained a mean score of 78 (Table 7). The other constraints include lack of determination, lack of positive attitude, lack of entrepreneurship skills, lack of risk bearing ability, lack of ability to diversify production and lack of communication skills.

Evidently, the fisherwomen of the Self Help Groups (SHGs) have been entangled with a myriad of constraints of technical, financial, organizational

Table 7. Entrepreneurship constraints

Constraints	Mean score	Rank
Lack of lateral thinking and innovation	78	I
Lack of determination	66	II
Lack of positive attitude	57	III
Lack of entrepreneurship skills	50	IV
Lack of risk bearing ability	42	V
Lack of ability to diversify production	34	VI
Lack of communication skills	22	VII

and policy realms. The technology generating institutions could help the fisherwomen through capacity building programs to acquire production, marketing and managerial or organizational skills. The fisherwomen SHGs could also avail the services of central and state research organizations, academic institutions and NGOs to empower themselves through successful business. Addressing these constraints could help in this regard and will certainly enable the fisherwomen produce and market their products more efficiently. It will ensure their livelihood security as well.

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