

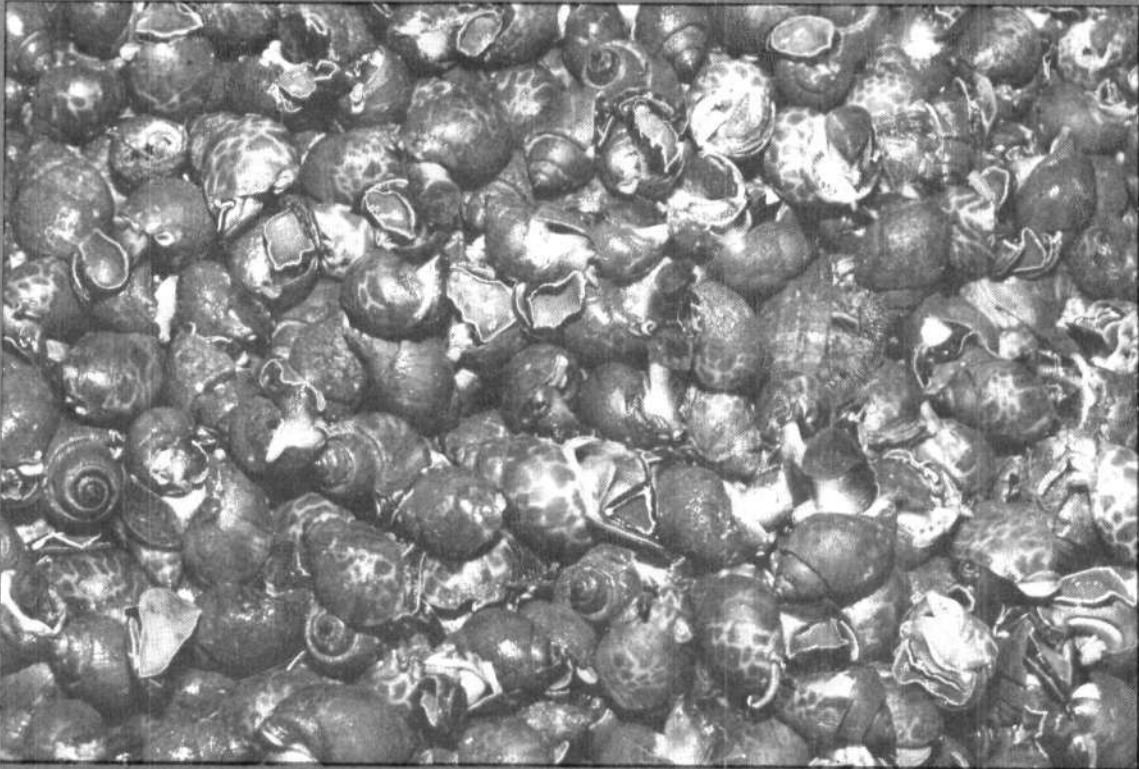


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RESEARCH INSTITUTE
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ACTION RESEARCH FOR RURAL EMPOWERMENT IN CHELLANAM FISHING VILLAGE

Krishna Srinath, A. N. Mohanan, K. P. Salini and Manpal Sridhar

Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Cochin - 682 014

The empowerment approach aims at equipping the rural people with ways and means of improving their living conditions. The model for rural women's empowerment suggested by Krishna Srinath, 1992 (*Ph. D Thesis, Avinashilingam Deemed University*) defined positive self-perception, perception of role of women in the society, economic independence, decision making, innovativeness and group action as some of the features of empowerment and income generation, community organisation and social welfare as important activities leading to empowerment. Extension education was found to be useful in producing the desired change in the target group.

The wards I - IV in the fishing village of Chellanam in Ernakulam district were selected for the study and women from fishing households were organised based on their felt needs. The group was named as *Matsyamahilavedi* (Fisherwomen's Forum) and was registered as a charitable society with 200 active members and elected office bearers.

Research project on Rural Women's Empowerment

Matsyamahilavedi has been adopted by the Institute under its research project on 'Empowering Rural Women through Extension Education'. The study aims at extending the above approach to technology transfer programmes of the Institute. The chief objectives of the programmes were helping the target group to identify suitable income-generating activities, providing them with the necessary skills and helping them to mobilise resources to achieve the aims following the principles of extension.

Involving women in prawn farming

In the rural prawn farming households women play important roles in supervising the activities in the family farms. In order to gainfully involve them in the enterprise and help them adopt innovations, the technology was demonstrated in a 10 cent coconut grove owned by a marine fisherwoman. Another 1 acre farm belonging to a fisherwoman was adopted to demonstrate the technology using the feed developed at the Institute. In this connection a five-day training programme in prawn farming was organised under which 15 women were trained in collection and identification of prawn seed, eradication of pests, supplementary feeding and water quality monitoring.

Formation of chemmeen karshakavedi

As a number of extension programmes on prawn farming were organised in the village it was felt that the farmers as a whole could benefit from them. Following the pattern of *Matsyamahilavedi*

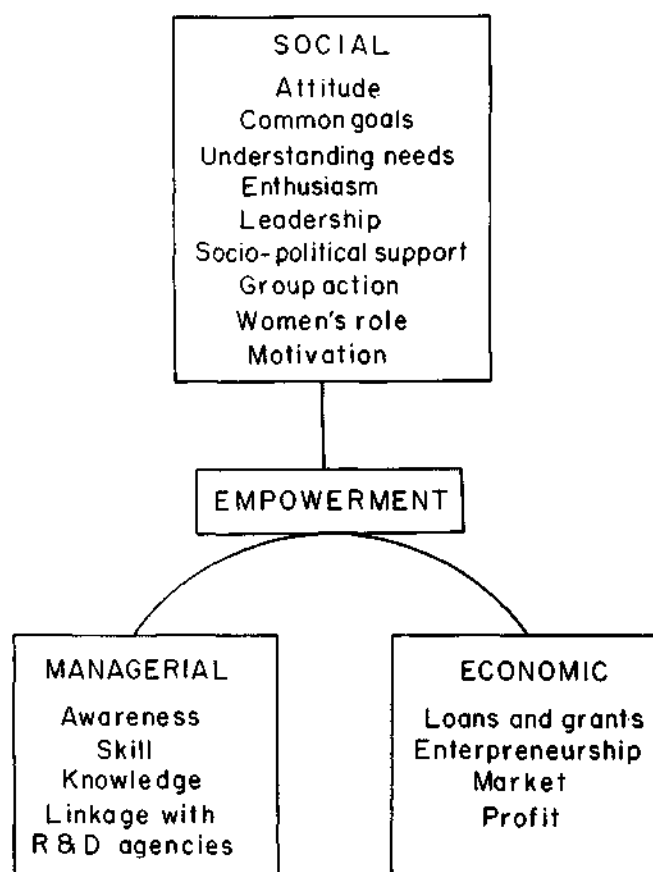


Fig. 1. Impact of the programme.



Fig. 2. Discussion with village women during a farm call.

the prawn farmers were brought together under a forum which was named as *Chemmeen Karshkavedi* with a woman as the vice president. The *Chemmeen Karshkavedi* covered South Chellanam, Marvakkad and Ganapathikad padasekharams.

Small-scale industry for prawn feed production

Availability of low cost nutritious feed has been a constraint in the adoption of improved prawn farming practices. The technology for on-farm feed production using locally available ingredients was found to be appropriate for women as an income generating activity. Women were trained in different aspects of feed production and a group loan of Rs 25,000 through the Corporation Bank under NABARD's refinancing scheme was arranged for five women from prawn farming households. This group was nominated by *Matsyamahilavedi*. An electrically operated pulveriser for powdering the ingredients and a



Fig. 3. Training of the farmer in the eradication of pests using ammonia.



Fig. 4. Prawn feed production in the small scale industry unit set up under the project.

hand operated pelletiser were procured and the production was started. The unit could produce about 100 kg feed per day. The marketing prospects of the feed was found encouraging from the feedback on local sales. The unit is named as *Matsyamahila Industries* and the product is named as '*Mahima*'.

Fishing net making unit

Hand-braiding of fishing nets is a traditional skill among women from marine fishing households. Sixty women were organised to handbraid nets for reservoir fisheries which were not fabricated by machines which could help them earn a labour charge of about Rs 25,000 in a period of three months. The unit has now received a grant-in-aid of Rs 1.4 lakhs from the Central Social Welfare Board with which a fishing net making unit which can provide regular employment to 30 women has been set up. The unit specialises fabricating cod-end of trawl nets and cast nets.

Training in entrepreneurship

A five-day campaign on entrepreneurship development was organised for forty women selected by *Matsyamahilavedi*. The curriculum included topics such as self development, need for self employment, need for organisation, co-operation, meaning and functions of leadership, interpersonal relationship, enterprise building and management and developing entrepreneurial qualities. The group was also made aware of different schemes and financial support available with R&D agencies for enterprise development.

Other supporting activities

The chief objective of the programme was to organise activities for women which would

provide opportunities for them to participate in decision making and resource mobilisation and scientifically evaluate the changes produced by the project activities and it was necessary to bring more women into the programme. With the existing infrastructure and other resources it was difficult to reach all women through fisheries related activities. Hence programmes such as formation of a co-operative for note book making under the Khadi Board and setting up of poultry units with the help of a non-governmental unit were taken up. The social welfare programme included the child care facility for the children of fisherfolk, installation of smokeless *chulas* as a drudgery relief measure, nutrition education, growing of leafy vegetables and health camps.

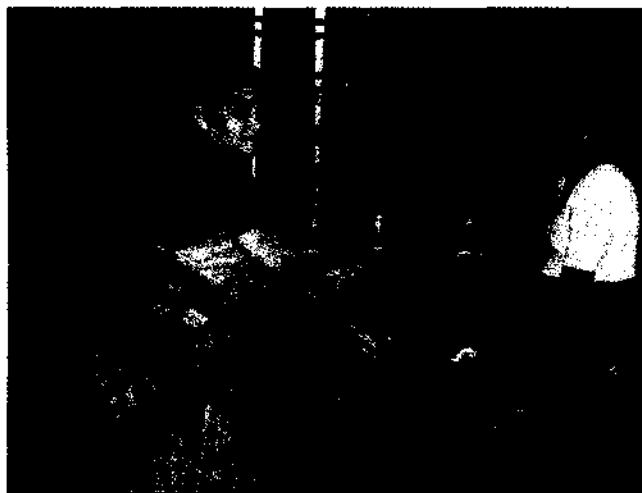


Fig. 5. Smokeless 'chulah' installed in a fisher's house.

Programmes for marine fishermen

The Project had also taken care to involve male members of the fishing community although there was no specific activity to serve their interest. During the house calls for surveys and for meeting women the Project personnel had opportunities to interact with fishermen and give them advice related to their occupations. They were also encouraged to participate in the public meetings organised under the Project and gain awareness about the developments in fisheries.

Extension methods used

A variety of extension teaching methods such as result and method demonstrations, lecture, group discussion, seminar, field trips, farm and home visits, circular letters and audio visual aids were used. Posters, banners and newspaper and television announcements were used to give publicity about the programme. The

campaign approach was followed in conducting some of the programmes. The members also participated in exhibitions and seminars on development themes organised by other agencies within and outside the state.

Linkage with R&D agencies

The success of any community action programme depends on the support given by the agencies in the related fields. The programmes were implemented with the support of R&D agencies in fisheries and rural development as well as voluntary organisations. The involvement of other agencies also helped in sensitizing the development supporting system to the needs of the target group and introduce a systems approach in resource mobilization.

Securing public support

Public support for the successful implementation of the programme was secured by constituting an advisory committee with local leaders and eminent persons from different walks of life located in and around the project area. Public meetings were also held to mark the beginning of important activities such as seminars and campaigns inviting local leaders, people's representatives, religious leaders and government officials.

Monitoring and evaluation

The Project has inbuilt mechanism for periodical evaluation of the progress. In order to ascertain that the project fulfills the set in



Fig. 6. The prawn farmer is being explained the procedure of water quality monitoring.



Fig. 7. Inauguration of extension campaign for fisherwomen sponsored by Central Workers' Education Board.

objectives, produces the desired results and makes necessary revisions, M&E was carried out in each phase of the activity.

Programme impact

The progress of activities promises a positive impact of the Project on the living conditions of the target group. Bench mark information has been collected from the target group in the study village as well as the control group outside the village for a comparative study at the end of the project. Earlier studies on rural empowerment has established that intervention through extension education could help in producing the qualities of empowerment among women. Figure 1 gives the impact of the programme on certain indicators of empowerment. Low sustainability and lack of managerial skills have been the limiting factors in the development of women-specific enterprises in rural areas. Specific attention to this aspect has been given at each stage of the programme planning and implementation by providing practical experience in decision making and evaluation. The project helped in improving the awareness status of participating women and indicates substantial changes in their self perception and leadership qualities. The group continues to function effectively and attracts more women to the programmes. The programmes have also helped to build up enthusiasm among the participants as well as other socio-political groups in the village. The technology transfer efforts have helped to bring in changes in the psycho-motor domain in skill development and enabled them to use more gainfully the available resources. The participatory approach to development planning could be

demonstrated and the community could be educated on the benefits of group action.

Strengths and opportunities

The following are some of the strengths and opportunities developed through the Project activities :

Systematic effort in selection of target group, needs assessment and people's participation particularly of lower strata, understanding of target group psychology, creation of strong village-level organisations to channelise information and other inputs, collective strength and experienced manpower in programme implementation, intra-group decisions and M&E rapport with villagers and village-level functionaries and their confidence in the programme, linkage with government and voluntary agencies for technical help and finance, political support, flexibility and freedom in carrying out project activities, common objectives and feedback.

Constraints and obstacles

Low level of education of the target group delayed decisions, weak TOT infrastructure, lack of access to inputs, mismanagement of target group functions, preference for traditional skills, financial delay, intra group conflicts and social tensions were some of the negative factors of the programme. As the Project has concern for developing the problem solving abilities of the target group the obstacles and constraints can be overcome by strengthening the group and its activities.

Suggestion for future programmes

The basic goal in the development of women in fishing communities is to make them self reliant participants for improving their conditions. Development work must support women in their domestic, economic and social roles and provide them opportunities to acquire technologies, enabling them to contribute to the economic well being. The Project has helped to work out a methodological framework for rural women's empowerment and building up consciousness and enthusiasm among the selected section of the target group which might help them to play active role in the development of the village. The extension and technology transfer objectives of the Institute has the pivotal position in the programme for whose effective implementation other activities has been integrated. The village has served as a social laboratory for testing and evaluating the innovations in fisheries and

approaches in their communication. As the activity groups are ready to absorb inputs and distribute the benefits, other R&D agencies can take advantage of the opportunities to extend their projects and schemes.

Considering the overall impact created by the project and potentials available with the village to develop activities based on different mariculture practices it is suggested that the project may be strengthened with inputs for integrated development and extended to cover more areas of the village.

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