

**Asia/ India****Getting the count right**

*The Marine Fisheries Census 2005 provides, among other things, information on women's work in fisheries-related activities in India*

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The fisheries sector in India is estimated to provide employment to several million people. There can be no denying the importance of good data about the people who harvest, process and trade in fish resources, to put in place effective management systems, given that fisheries management is about managing people and their interactions with the resource base.

The Marine Fisheries Census 2005, commissioned by the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, and conducted by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) is a commendable effort in this direction. The census provides a wealth of information that will be useful for policymakers, researchers and others in the sector.

The last comprehensive census was conducted by CMFRI in 1980. It covered 2,132 marine fishing villages, with 1,442 landing centres and 333,038 households. The 2005 census covered 3,202 marine fishing villages, 1,332 landing centres and 756,212 households (a total of 3.52 mn marine fisherfolk) in all maritime States and Union Territories of India. It does not cover the Andaman and Nicobar islands and the islands of Lakshadweep.

Notably, the census has data on women working in fisheries-related activities in the marine fisheries sector. The lack of reliable data on women's work in the fisheries sector has long been pointed out as a major lacuna in fisheries statistics, in India and elsewhere. It has been stressed that lack of data reinforces the invisibility of women's work, and is a major reason for gender-blind fisheries policies that assume that it is men who dominate the sector.

The census was conducted with the following objectives:

- determine population size and structure at a micro level;
- assess the educational and socio-religious status of fisherfolk;
- determine the number of active fishermen engaged in fishing;
- determine gender-wise occupation in fishery-related activities;
- determine the number of craft and gear owned by fisherfolk;
- quantify the number of craft and gear in the fishery;
- obtain information on infrastructure facilities, such as landing centres;
- obtain information on other utilitarian facilities and social aspects; and
- provide information on the number of fishing villages, landing centres, fisherfolk population, active fishermen, occupational status, fishing craft and gear and related parameters.

In keeping with the above objectives, the census provides detailed information on several aspects of the fisheries sector, including population size and structure, educational level, craft and gear, ownership of craft and gear, as well as the availability of basic facilities, such as health and education. The attempt below is to look at some of this large volume of data, from a gender perspective.

The census notes that women form 48.6 per cent of the marine fisherfolk population, with 948 females for 1,000 males—the all India sex ratio, according to the Census of India 2001, is 933 ([http://www.censusindia.net/t\\_00\\_003.html](http://www.censusindia.net/t_00_003.html)). The sex ratio for fishing communities is maximum in Kerala (980) and minimum in West Bengal (898), among the States of India. According to data from the 2001 Census of India, the sex ratio for Kerala as a whole is 1,058, and for West Bengal it is 934. Why is the sex ratio in fishing communities so low in Kerala, given that for the State as a whole, the ratio is favourable? Several such issues need to be further explored by researchers

and others working in the sector.

It is noteworthy that the census provides information on community issues, such as availability of electricity, banks, accessible roads, health and education facilities, housing, and membership in co-operative societies. There is also information on the fishery-related infrastructure available—boatyards, ice factories, cold storage, freezing and canning plants, curing yards, peeling sheds and fishmeal plants. Undoubtedly, this data should be used by policymakers to improve access to basic facilities and infrastructure. Perhaps the next census could also include aspects such as access to water and sanitation, key issues for many fishing communities.

The census defines a 'marine fisherman' as a person—man or woman—engaged in marine fishing or any other activity associated with marine fishery, or both. Fishing is defined to include activities like seed collection. The data that has been collected provides information on fishermen engaged in active fishing (full-time, part-time or occasional). However, the absence of gender-disaggregated data on those who fish makes it difficult to estimate the number of women engaged in actual marine fishing in India. Even if the number of women fishing is small, this information would have been useful. It is known, for example, that along some parts of the coast, women engage in shrimp seed collection; beach-seining; crab, shellfish and seaweed

collection; and so on. It would also have been useful to obtain a gender-differentiated picture on ownership of craft and gear.

Gender-disaggregated data is, however, available, as mentioned earlier, for those engaged in fishery-related activities, for example, marketing, providing labour, processing, net-making, and so on. The 2005 census notes that among women, the major fishing-related activities are marketing (41.8 per cent), labour (18.4 per cent) and curing/processing (18 per cent). Further, as many as 73.6 per cent of those engaged in marketing are women, while 75.7 per cent of those in curing and processing are also women. It is apparent that women dominate marketing and processing activities in marine fisheries.

Statewise data indicates that the largest numbers of women in marketing are in Maharashtra (39,288), Tamil Nadu (31,019) and Andhra Pradesh (27,160). Significant numbers of women engage in processing/curing activities in Andhra Pradesh (24,524), Orissa (16,447) and Maharashtra (8,584). Men, on the other hand, predominate in activities such as repair and net making, and in providing labour for fishing activities.

A look at total numbers is also interesting. The total fisherfolk population is 3,519,116. Of this, 889,528 are classified as active fishermen; 390,928 men are found to engage in fishing-associated activities, while the corresponding figure for women is 365,463. Women, in other words, account for 48.3 per cent of the fisherfolk in fishing-associated activities.

The data collected proves beyond doubt that women are an integral part of the marine fisheries sector in India. It is to be hoped that this data is used effectively for the formulation of policies that reinforce and support women's roles in the fisheries, in activities such as marketing and processing, and stimulates further research. The detailed data and information available in the Statewise census reports should prove invaluable for this.

It is also to be hoped that such censuses are conducted with periodic regularity, and that efforts are made to improve the methodology used, the



dimensions and issues explored and the reliability of data collected. Further, the scope for better integrating the Marine Fisheries Census with the National Census needs to be explored. No doubt, lessons can be drawn from other countries that have undertaken similar efforts.

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