

Interview with Ujjwala Jaykishan Patil
(ujwalapatil@gmail.com), President, MMKS' Women's Wing, Mumbai, India

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What major challenges do women fish vendors in Mumbai face?

Our fish markets have no basic infrastructural facilities like clean and sanitary workspaces, fish storage facilities or toilets for women to use. The fish landing sites in villages lack proper access to auction areas, and facilities for disposal of waste fish. This lack of infrastructure directly affects the livelihoods of women fish vendors.

How have fish vendors organized to respond to these challenges?

There are around 25,000 fish vendors in Mumbai. Most of them are members of the women's wing of the Maharashtra Machchimar Kruti Samiti (MMKS), a cooperative organization representing all fish workers. The MMKS has been continuously representing the demands women fish vendors for better facilities with the fisheries authorities. They have also taken up demands for loans and subsidies to women fishers. The women members are also challenging the predominantly male leadership within the MMKS in order to get their voices heard and have more attention paid to their demands.

What other specific issues have the women taken up in the recent past?

The MMKS women's wing continuously fought for compensation to fishers affected by the oil spill off the Mumbai seashore in 2010. The women fish vendors showed their support by coming to every court hearing in large numbers. The MMKS has demanded the registration of cooperatives of women fish vendors by the state fisheries authorities. It has also demanded a scheme of social security for all fish vendors in Mumbai. A report was prepared by the MMKS, in collaboration with the ICSF, to enumerate and map the existing natural fish markets in Mumbai city and include them in the Development Plan of Mumbai. The women fish vendors obtained formal licences and biometric Identity cards in 2010, with the support of the MMKS. ❏