



INNOVATION BRIEF

Market Engagement Series | 2010

2008 Ami Vitale/CARE

Changing Traditional Roles of Women in the Fisheries Sector

Learning Themes:

Engaging women and Girls in markets | Empowering Marginalized and Disadvantaged women | Improving Market Facilitation Practices | Enhance Linkages of Women to Value Chains | Post-Disaster Market Engagement

Context

Coastal communities in the Cuddalore district of Tamil Nadu in southeastern India suffered lasting effects in the wake of the 2004 tsunami, when more than 2,800 hectares of land were rendered unproductive and more than 6,000 traditional fishing boats were destroyed. The ramifications of the tsunami's destruction were particularly devastating for women in coastal areas. Women from scheduled caste fishing communities faced a strong gender bias before the disaster, which restricted their participation in the fishing value chain to post-catch processing even more.

With the loss of fishing infrastructure and the depletion of arable land, women in these communities were left in vulnerable positions – dependent solely on the limited catch of their husbands to support their livelihoods and food needs. Women from backward tribes living near but not on the coast were even further marginalized. Women from the Irula tribe, with which CARE eventually worked, for instance were subject to caste- and ethnic-

based discrimination, even greater than that of women from fishing communities possess. Backward tribe members were prohibited from engaging in fishing activities and forced to rely primarily on backwater fishing as a source of nutrition and income. Driven to the very bottom of the social strata, this group of women suffered significantly as a result of the natural disaster, with little hope of improving their livelihood or social standing.

As part of the Tsunami Response Project, CARE identified pronounced gaps in the backwater fishing value chain and recognized an opportunity to use a market-based intervention in the crab sector to simultaneously empower highly marginalized women, increase incomes and food security and ameliorate ethnic rivalry for scarce resources between scheduled castes and backward tribes.

Human Impact

Meet Jaya. Prior to CARE's intervention in Pichavaram region, she and her family gathered small prawn, snakes and rats in backwaters to make living—barely enough to provide for her family's subsistence. With no access to formal credit, Jaya borrowed at high interest rates from informal moneylenders to cover food and health expenses. In the 2004 tsunami disaster, Jaya's family lost their most valuable possessions— fishing nets and a small inland boat.

With nowhere else to turn, Jaya became one of the first members of the crab production pilot group organized by CARE. She quickly acquired new skills and gained financial and entrepreneurial literacy through group activities. Soon her story became a beacon of hope and inspiration for the entire community. Her whole family now takes part in crab production, and she is now able to send her children to school and pay for their educational expenses.

Through CARE's initiative Jaya has learned reading and math skills that allow her to advance the cooperative's market position. Her new vocation and the financial stability it offers have made her a confident and inspirational member of the community.



CARE's Response

Community interactions during CARE's initial work providing disaster relief and supporting shelter reconstruction offered valuable insight into the complex social dynamics in the communities affected by the tsunami.

As the immediate emergency subsided, CARE found itself in a unique position to analyze the needs of these communities and design appropriate market-based interventions to support longer-term recovery.

Applying a sustainable livelihoods lens, CARE observed that:

- ◆ Fisherwomen traditionally had restricted participation in the fishing value chain because of structural and gender-based barriers that relegated them to lower-value positions that depended heavily on the catch, which was a male-dominated activity.
- ◆ Irula tribeswomen were the most marginalized members of the local communities. Their economic opportunities had been relegated to relying on the forest for their livelihoods and they were blocked socially from accessing the sea.
- ◆ Backwater fishing techniques were rudimentary at best and there was little to no organization among backwater fisheries in production, packaging or distribution.

With these gaps in mind, CARE followed a multi-stakeholder approach, launching an effort to organize a backwater crab production chain based on market principles. The initiative engaged the Central Institute of Brackish Water Aquaculture (CIBA) to explore possibilities for aquaculture in the region, the Asian Development Bank and the Indian governments, as well as local communities for financing and local community members from both the Irula tribe and the local fishing community.

Following initial consultations with all stakeholders, CARE mobilized 100 women from four fishing and Irula villages into seven activity-based groups. The initiative consisted of a series of key activities that supported the groups in establishing and operat-

ing backwater crab farmer enterprises:

1. **Facilitating** business management training to improve financial and market literacy for group members through local NGO partners and drawing in support from CIBA to build women's technical skills and provide hands-on training.
2. **Connecting** group members to formal financial markets by working with financial institutions to create group bank accounts.
3. **Investing** in basic infrastructure and increasing the project's potential for sustainability in the longer-run by building a credit culture among the participants.
4. **Engaging** the Forestry Department to ensure the enterprises would not negatively impact surrounding natural resources.

Beyond these core activities, CARE worked with its partners to mitigate inevitable tensions within the community, including:

- ◆ Fishing village members, both men and women that were reluctant to allow Irula women to grow crabs in the backwater areas close to their villages.
- ◆ Members of the communities wanting to participate in the pilot once it started to succeed.
- ◆ Challenges from government agencies to the economic activity being supported, particularly from the Forestry Department which initially deemed it an environmental threat.

Throughout the intervention, CARE focused intently on engaging traditional village leaders in the process of building commercially-viable crab fattening enterprises that could be jointly managed by Irula tribeswomen and coastal fisherwomen. The strategy aimed to build buy in for the work the women were pursuing while also ensuring its long-term sustainability.

Human Impact

"Our ambition is to make my daughter become a good teacher and to create good opportunities for my son. [Because] of crab fattening activity, we have gained self-confidence – nothing seems impossible!"

"I can read the bus board and can take my colleagues to the crab market. Also, we are able to bargain with the crab vendors and trash fish suppliers to purchase [inputs] at the market rates. Moreover, I am supporting my SHG leader in weighing and looking after the [crabs]."

- Tsunami Response Project participants.



Results

Though the number of participants involved is relatively small at just 100 women, the impact of the intervention and the lessons it holds for CARE's work in reaching highly-vulnerable women with market engagement support are substantial.

The crab fattening intervention:

- Enabled participating women to take advantage of a new market opportunity
- Enhanced their linkages to value chain
- Empowered them to withstand gender and social prejudice.

The project also created new bonds between women who previously had not seen one another as allies or partners. Some specific outcomes include:

- ◆ 88 women (36 Irula women and 52 fisherwomen) across seven communities increased their incomes as a direct result of the intervention.
- ◆ Nearly 10,000 crabs weighing 6.4 tons were raised during the life of the project, yielding sales of \$31,513 and a gross profit of \$16,042.
- ◆ Women have received access to loans worth \$17,000 and have steadily repaid.
- ◆ Discrimination against Irula women has been reduced through changes in the perceptions of individual, institutional power structures and the relationships Irula women have built with coastal fisherwomen.

At a community level, a less tangible but very important result has been increasing partnership and dialogue between fishing villages and Irula tribes. CARE has found a remarkably positive change among participants in their attitudes toward tribal women. This dynamic has begun to spread into the greater community, resulting in lessening tensions between the fishing communities and Irula tribes more broadly – a dramatic shift facilitated in large part through the development of a common economic activity that crossed traditional barriers.

The crab production chain has also altered the local dynamics of women's labor force participation and women's involvement in the local economy. The women involved have readily embraced their roles as decision-makers and are becoming adept at business

planning and marketing techniques. This progress is significant considering that at the project outset, fisherwomen were confined to a single activity within the post-harvest fish processing system with limited or no market opportunities and Irula tribeswomen were even further excluded from economic activity.

Lessons Learned

The transition of women from subsistence to high-potential value chains can serve as an impetus for overcoming gender biases that exist in traditionally male-dominated rural labor markets. Creating opportunities for mutual gain based on collaboration rather than competing interests among female participants of different ethnic and social backgrounds has the potential to change the position of the most marginalized and vulnerable women within the entire community and can be done through an economically viable and environmentally sustainable intervention.

Successful value chain interventions require a focus on more than one aspect of the value chain. CARE facilitated access to credit, training, inputs and markets through partnerships with a range of stakeholders in order to ensure the viability of the intervention. Though focused predominantly on the immediate needs for production and marketing at the enterprise level, the approach illustrates the need for efforts to be invested in building strong, grassroots institutions to coordinate higher value opportunities involving a heterogeneous group of participants.

An intervention involving different groups of stakeholders should follow a non-confrontational approach. Realizing that community dynamics are vital to success of the initiative, CARE and its partners must take precautions to not alienate any one group and must coordinate efforts in a collaborative and cohesive way.

A multi-stakeholder approach is a critical success factor. Leveraging support from as many stakeholders as possible decreases individual stakeholder risks and makes the activity more sustainable in the long run.

CARE's exit will be a key test in sustainability of the project and ability of the women to continue. This is a big risk and a point at which many economic development initiatives collapse.

About the Market Engagement Innovation Briefs Series

In 2008, CARE launched its Market Engagement Strategy with a goal of empowering 10 million women and girls to lift themselves out of poverty by 2015 by promoting dignified employment and sustainable incomes. As CARE works towards this goal, we seek to promote changes in agricultural and other high-potential value chain that enhance industry competitiveness as well as the opportunities for and benefits the poor gain from market participation.

Innovation Briefs are one tool CARE is using to build internal and external awareness of CARE's successes and lessons learned through market engagement. We hope these brief summaries of our work foster further innovation and success as we continue to work toward equitable, sustainable and productive solutions to alleviate global poverty.

Market Engagement Innovation Briefs Editions

- **Pedaling Power: CARE and Zambikes Go the Last Kilometer for Input Supply in Rural Zambia**
- **White and Blue: CARE Creates New Opportunities for Women through Dairy Production along the Coast of Southern India**
- **From Fishing Nets to Safety Nets: Introducing Microinsurance in the Coastal Communities in Southern India**

Other CARE Market Engagement Resources

- CARE 2008—2015 Market Engagement Strategy (Spanish, French, English)
- Market Engagement Annual Report 2010: The State of Our Practice (forthcoming)
- CARE Kenya LIME & LIP Fund Case Study

All CARE Market Engagement publications can be found on our website.
<http://edu.care.org>



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