

Turning the Tide: Women's Lives in Fisheries and the Assault of Capital

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Over the years, research on women in the fisheries moved from a framework of political economy to a framework of political ecology. This meant that analyses shifted away from labour, production relations and surplus value extraction typically grounded in Marxian modes of analysis, in favour of those focused on environmental sustainability, livelihood sustainability and a discourse on poverty. During this period, women's labour has been mobilised at an unprecedented scale and concentrated in the most exploitative jobs to fuel economic growth in fisheries. Even as industrial fisheries thrive on the labour of poor women, new analyses and new forms of organising are needed to fundamentally challenge this exploitation. Capital cannot be left unfettered to do as it pleases, but must be forced through stringent regulation to heed other considerations apart from profitability alone. Donor aid is, however, driving the non-governmental organisation increasingly towards conciliatory, mediatory roles, incapable of seeking solutions outside the framework of capital.

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A review of the literature on women in the fisheries spanning the past three decades reveals a set of five developments:

- First, in a span of 30 years, research analysis shifted from women's labour to survival and livelihood issues, moving from a labour to an ecological framework.
- Second, the idea of women's empowerment gained ascendancy over the idea of women's exploitation and oppression.
- Third, this period saw the rise of rights-based approaches.
- Fourth, the idea of "community" emerged during this period.
- Finally, multi-donor aid, embedded in the ideology of liberalisation and free market as a single prescription for all, increasingly shaped activities in the fishing sector.

Although these may appear to be distinct developments, more so because they will be elaborated one by one in the following sections, it is important to understand that they have evolved not in isolation, but in fact, in deeply related ways. They must, therefore, be read and analysed together. Of particular significance is the last point, the growing dominance of development aid, which has played a key role in manufacturing a global and uniform discourse on development, and strongly shaping the rest of the developments outlined above.

Of the 43.5 million people around the world directly employed in fishing and aquaculture, 90% are small-scale fishers¹ (FAO 2005). The majority (86%) live in Asia; most under the conditions of great poverty (FAO 2008). For every person directly employed in fishing or fish farming, it is estimated that four others are employed in post- or pre-harvest work (ibid). However, most countries do not consider the work that these four others do – work such as fish processing and the selling of fish, transportation, net and gear making, boat building, fuel supply, engine repair – to be economically productive. Thus, in 2010, the labour of about 174 million people across the world remained largely invisible in fishery statistics and was either unpaid or insufficiently paid for. Women made up the bulk of this figure. Because the numbers dependent on fishing for a livelihood is increasing every year, the numbers of women whose labour is freely exploited can be said to be proportionately soaring. This is ironic since never before has the question of women in the fisheries been more visible than it has in the recent past.

The fishing sector has undergone substantial changes in the last few decades. The collapse of industrial fishing in the North and its shift to the global South,² the overexploitation of marine resources, and the shift from capture to culture fisheries, these changes have been accompanied by documentation and research

which have influenced policy, practice and the flow of resources to the fishing sector.

The literature on women in the fisheries in the last three decades was reviewed for the purpose of this paper. This period was marked by two significant milestones in the history of development aid. Its start, in the late 1980s, coincided with the formulation of what is known as the Washington Consensus; towards the end of this period, in 2005, there was the drafting of the Paris Declaration. "Development" via neo-liberal economic reforms was the key thrust of the Washington Consensus. In the Paris Declaration, good governance took priority with consequent implications for aid budgets. As international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) worked the policy prescriptions of the Washington Consensus into core-loan conditionalities for country after borrowing country, the financial and policy impacts of economic restructuring were felt across every sector. In the case of the fisheries, this intensified an export-led growth boom and led to the deregulation of international trade and cross-border investment. As the new millennium dawned, the economic restructuring of the global South, accelerated by the Washington Consensus, was more or less completed. Capitalist reforms were largely in place in all poor countries. It now became critical for industry to reshuffle its priorities in order to consolidate its hold over newly emerging market economies. In the last 10 years or so, industry has, therefore, pushed for two things: one, in order that norms related to environment, labour, and so on, are harmonised with the interests of industry, it has pushed for the privatisation of regulation, and two, in order that people affected by the reforms do not perish, it has pushed for the specific targeting of aid to the most impoverished. The success of both privatisation and targeted aid depends on efficient management and delivery systems. For these reasons, the capitalist agenda has now shifted to "good governance", and thus, the "harmonisation" of aid with national goals is the focus of the Paris Declaration of 2005. With this context in mind, we turn to the key developments that mark the literature on women in the fisheries.

1 From Political Economy to Political Ecology

Over the years, research on women in the fisheries moved from a framework of political economy to a framework of political ecology. This meant that analyses shifted away from labour, production relations and surplus value extraction typically grounded in Marxian modes of analysis, in favour of analyses focused on environmental sustainability, livelihood sustainability and a discourse on poverty.

The early studies on women in the fisheries came out of a context of organised struggle by fishers all over the world; in the north, against the rapid breakdown of fishing communities and declining access to fish resources; and in parts of the south, livelihood struggles that demanded, for instance, regulation of trawling activities, public transport for women fish vendors and reduction of market taxes for women vendors. Although Marxian class analysis was often central to the framework of the early literature, this analysis was actively questioned its failure to account for the work that women did in the household and outside. A body of research evolved, which often reflected the vibrant political culture of the times and opened up new vistas in the literature (Connelly and MacDonald 1983;

MacDonald and Connelly 1989; Nayak 1986; Thompson 1985; Porter 1983, 1985, 1987; Nadel-Klein and Davis 1988).

The fishing economy, it became clear, would collapse if the fish that is caught is not processed and sold, if families are not fed and clothed, or if fishermen are not freed from the pressures of household work to go to sea. However, only one type of labour (the act of fishing) was found to be economically valued while the other (everything else) was undervalued/underpaid or not valued at all/unpaid. To explain this, the early studies turned to ways in which patriarchal power relations were institutionalised in fishing societies. This included the sexual division of labour, which seemed to provide the biological justification for patriarchal practices. It also included the split both between the public and the private spheres and between the spheres of production and reproduction. In the private sphere of the fishing economy, that is, in the domestic or household domain, poor women, who formed the bulk of the small-scale fisheries, put in long hours, working until they were ready to collapse. However, this work (for example, cleaning and drying fish, mending nets, cooking for the family) was considered to be economically valueless and remained unwaged. Productive or waged work (for example, the selling of fish) was considered to take place only in the public sphere of the market.

The public-private separation ensured that a certain type of labour (typically of women but also that of children, migrants and so on) would subsidise the dominant economy. Subsidies were extracted at three levels. One, women, in accordance with the sexual division of labour, routinely put in unpaid labour into essential tasks without which active fishing could not be sustained. They thus heavily subsidised the traditional fishing economy and helped maintain the "resilience of small-scale fishing communities". Two, in poor countries, women's labour also subsidised the State by absorbing the costs of reproducing the fishing family (day-care for children, cooking for the household, care of the sick and elderly, etc) into the private sphere of the family and the community, allowing the State to abandon its social responsibilities towards the working poor. Three, the cheaply available labour of women directly subsidised industrial or capitalist fisheries by keeping wage levels in factories and production sites low (Connelly and MacDonald 1983). Thus, the growing demand for "labour market flexibility", a euphemism for poor wages and working conditions, casual work and absence of organisation, triggered a trend towards feminisation of employment in the fisheries of the global south (Neis et al 2005).

Women act as a reserve army of labour for capital, to be hired or fired at will as economic conditions demand (Connelly and MacDonald 1983). This important insight explains why women in many industrialised countries were drawn into the labour force when capital needed cheap labour and fired when capital relocated itself to the South, for instance, when canning factories moved out of countries in the North to Thailand and Seychelles. This analysis of women's work continues to be important in the context of the global south, where capital is consolidating itself through exploiting highly vulnerable forms of feminised labour. The increasing use of sex as a form of economic exchange by poor women, as we see in "fish-for-sex" transactions requires an understanding of the political economy of our times and is just one

example of how women in poverty are drawn into highly exploitative forms of production and exchange relations.

The political economy framework, however, had its blind spots and shortcomings. It lacked an ecological dimension at a time when fish resources were clearly dwindling. Further, it often viewed technology as a liberating force, overlooking the problems technology introduced. Over the years, the livelihood struggles of poor women in the South against deforestation, coastal commercialisation, industrial agriculture and commercial seeds (Mies 1986; Mies and Shiva 1993) brought questions of ecological sustainability to the forefront, forcing new frameworks of analysis to emerge. These rightly focused attention on the declining natural resource base and questioned production and consumption relations from the point of view of sustainability but were marked by an untenable biological essentialism (Agarwal 1992).

There are efforts today to articulate a more non-essentialist version of feminist political ecology which take into account women's role in community coastal and marine resource management and frameworks of indigenous knowledge systems (Bavington et al 2005). These point out the futility of narrowly-conceived regimes of fisheries management and urge for holistic approaches that locate the fisheries in the entire web of life thus questioning not just unsustainable fishery practices, but all forms of ecologically unsustainable development.

Such frameworks, no doubt, allow for a more dialectical process of questioning, but there are several unanswered gaps with respect to women. One is that their non-essentialist nature is never made clear. The arguments tend to be articulated at a moral and spiritual level without very clear notions of how the specific nature of women's oppression in the private and public sphere is to be addressed, for example, the issues of waged work in the context of more and more women from fishing communities seeking part-time and full-time livelihoods outside the fisheries to make ends meet; the sexual division of labour; patriarchal domination within families and communities, and so on. If political economy frameworks failed to address the ecological dimension adequately, political ecology frameworks fail in equal measure to address the question of labour, particularly women's labour, within the household and local markets as well as in the factories and fish processing plants. For the bulk of women in the small-scale fisheries, whose labour power is possibly their sole asset, this represents an immense and unjustifiable loss of focus.

2 From Exploitation and Oppression to Empowerment

Over the last few decades the ideas of women's oppression and exploitation have given way to the notion of women's empowerment. The idea of women's oppression was tied to the understanding of patriarchy, a term used by women's movements in many poor countries to refer to a system of power relations that controlled women's labour, fertility and sexuality in multiple ways to serve institutions both in the private and public domain. The notion of women's exploitation was tied to an understanding of the appropriation of women's labour by capital. The analysis of patriarchy made it clear that keeping women out of decision-making was not an accidental oversight, but rather a strategy in the fisheries that, say, the *cofradía*, the caste panchayat or the

modern trade union used to control power and perpetuate the status quo. Because the prevailing structures of power in the traditional fishing community and family gain material benefits from women's unpaid and underpaid labour, they all tend to impose patriarchal boundaries on women's lives, using violence if needed to guard these boundaries. The early studies demonstrated how the hidden and devalued nature of women's domestic labour served to devalue women in the marketplace when they sought employment. They also highlighted the role of the State in transforming familial forms of patriarchy to social forms as the fisheries shifted from the household to the industrial mode of production in countries of the North (Neis 1997).

Globally, however, the idea of women's exploitation and oppression soon began to be discredited. One reason was that it affected capital too strongly, together with patriarchy and other structures of power responsible of the subjugation of women, and had therefore, to be co-opted. Another reason was that in the period of the Washington Consensus, capitalist opportunities inherent in integrating women into development began to be recognised. By 1979, the United Nations had adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which promised equal opportunities for women. While this promise of equality was good news for women of the upper classes who had access to education or investment capital, for the vast majority of women in the sector who were poor, to expect equality within capitalism, a system that thrived on subsidies gained from their exploitation, was no more than a cruel joke. But this was a period of the World Bank/IMF-led structural adjustment, which forced borrowing countries to privatise basic services, to open up their markets, to dilute, if not remove, any existing labour, environmental and coastal regulation that stood in the way of industry, and to follow export-led models of economic growth. As traditional livelihoods soon began to get wiped out, poor women, anxious for a means of survival, joined waged work in unprecedented numbers.

It was in this period that dilution began in the ways that the term "gender" was used in the fisheries literature. Although the term was everywhere, it was rarely explained. When it was explained, there was little consistency or rigour regarding its use. Gender was variously defined as a "social role" (Williams et al 2005); as "the relations between men and women" (FAO 2004); as a "structuring principle in society" (Bavington et al 2005); and sometimes even tautologically, as the "basis of certain behavioural standards, values and patterns regarding both genders" (Aguilar and Castaneda 2001). In different contexts, thus, the term referred to different constructions; in one instance, material, in another, ideological. The implications were, of course, significant and different.

It was not just by coincidence that the term "gender empowerment" gained currency in this period. The idea of "empowerment" is, generally speaking, associated, as Petras (1997) observes, with "non-confrontational politics, never going beyond influencing small areas of social life, with limited resources, and within the conditions permitted by the neoliberal state and macroeconomy". While the framework of gender empowerment cleared the path for the uncontested assimilation of women into capitalism, another term embraced widely was "gender mainstreaming". Popularised by the 1995 Beijing Conference, the political implications

of this term were clear: capitalism, race, caste, religion and other structures of power were not the problem for women and did not need to be challenged so long as gender could somehow be “mainstreamed” into them; as long as some women became the beneficiaries of these divisions.

In this period, ecological viewpoints gained wide acceptance. Therefore, when “environment” was added to the “women and development” cocktail, and celebrated, as it was during 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the empowerment discourse received further impetus. “Earth mother myths” about women’s innate closeness to nature implied that women were the “natural caretakers” of the environment (Leach 2007). Empowerment training was all that was required to draw out this natural potential. In development practice, the women-environment link meant that women’s labour, skills and knowledge were used to subsidise forestry and coastal conservation programmes and women were drawn in to “unpaid labour surveillance tasks” (Nayak 2008).

The issue of gender soon became all about providing “opportunities” such as empowerment training, skills training, microcredit, and so on, taking attention away from the structural and political roots of the problem. Gender politics as a matter of consensus and assimilation rather than of struggle and resistance was institutionalised by state policy and propped up by donor aid. A class of professional “gender experts” sprang up across the world, embedded in a wide array of state, non-state and global bodies – the World Bank, the United Nations and its affiliates, national development agencies, governments, business firms, multinational companies and non-governmental organisations. This emerging collaboration has been critical for the global expansion of capital in the last three decades.

3 Rise of Rights-based Arguments

Two main types of rights-based arguments have gained ground in the last few decades – one as put forward by fisheries managers, which promotes private property rights in the fisheries to counter the problem of “open access”, and the other, the assertion by small-scale fishing communities of their human rights.

The State, in many parts of the industrial North, deployed the logic of “tragedy of the commons” to privilege individual rights over community rights in the fisheries, and the crisis brought on by industrial overfishing was sought to be addressed through privatisation. Aiding privatisation was the quota regime. The experience of Iceland demonstrates how the individual quota (IQ) system, introduced in 1984, first helped to consolidate fishing access in the hands of proprietors of large boats; thereafter, the individual transferable quota (ITQ) system, introduced in 1991, concentrated access even more in the hands of big corporations and absentee owners. Ocean fish, by law, common, national property, was transformed into a marketable, private commodity. While there were differences in the implementation of quota management systems, increasingly the fishing licence became a product that could be bought, sold, rented out or transferred at will (Munk-Madsen 1998; Skaptadóttir and Proppé 2005).

The continuing collapse of fish stocks in the northern seas prompted further market-led regulatory mechanisms such as the “professionalisation” of the sector which, in some countries,

restricted commercial fisheries to “core fishers”. This marginalised women further in the sector (Gerrard 2006) while at the same time, the rising cost of vessels and licence fees led to further quota concentration in the hands of fishing companies. Thus, the very crisis caused by industrial overfishing was used to drive away small fish producers, and consolidate the hold of large players on the sector. Since the late 1980s, this model of privatisation of the fisheries and the shift of regulation from state to the market is being globalised with transition economies such as South Africa, adopting the ITQ regime. Further, the privatisation model is being cast anew in the form of the wealth-based fisheries management approach, promoted by the World Bank and international aid agencies, which seeks to stem the “dissipation of resource rent” from the sector (Cunningham et al 2009).

While fisheries management regimes continue to prop up privatisation, there is also a case being made for adopting a different kind of rights-based framework – a human rights approach to fisheries development (Sharma nd-a). This approach argues that fishing communities are entitled to the full realisation of their human rights. Human rights, in this view, encompass economic, social, cultural and political rights and are the entitlements of not just individuals but of communities as well. How effective is the human rights argument in countering the alienation of small-scale fishing communities and how effectively does it address the issue of women’s rights within the traditional fisheries?

Historically, community rights are based on the idea of customary possession not ownership. Access, ownership, and the “dissipation of rent” through illegal leakages, overproduction and so on, were not contentious issues for fishing communities in earlier situations where the State was weak and its institutions remote. The collective possession of resources ensured that “resource rent” was absorbed into the community, typically enriching its powerful strata. However, in the era of market liberalisation, when capital penetration aided by the State gathered momentum, access became a highly contentious issue requiring regulation. In the political economy of the times, this meant privatised forms of regulation.

Another point of note is that the human rights discourse is a modern one, associated with individual citizens of democratic nation states. Central to it is the sanctity of private property. In this context, when advocacy groups in the fisheries argue that a human rights approach backed by an international apparatus of universally-held norms provides “a stronger basis for citizens to make claims on their States” (Sharma nd-b), it is not immediately clear what is being signalled.

If by human rights in the fisheries is meant the collective ownership of fishing lands and resources, then how would conflict be resolved when the community right to property clashes with private property rights? This is no mere academic question given the present era of market-led growth where the coasts are intensely contested properties and communities increasingly divided. If, on the other hand, by human rights is meant the preferential access of fishing communities to lands and resources, how would the human rights framework ensure this access not just for the fishing elites but equally for those at the bottom of community hierarchies, such as poor women? Further, can access rights provide enduring security? Since industry and development render them meaningless

over time, access rights are unlikely to be opposed by capital. Does the human rights argument not therefore represent an argument for accelerating class formation within traditional communities? And given that class formation in the fishing communities may have a socially restrictive effect on women (Hapke 2001), what does the human rights approach signify in term of women's rights in the traditional fisheries of the global South? There is also the related question of the human rights of the non-fishing poor. With food prices soaring and in the absence of social security, fishing is drawing increasing numbers of the traditionally non-fishing rural poor as a way out of poverty and starvation (FAO 2008). If the human rights discourse is formulated around the rights of the traditional fishing community, how then would the human rights of the non-fishing poor, such as occasional fishers, be addressed?

A major problem with the human rights discourse is that human rights are usually articulated in relation to the public domain and rarely linked to the domestic or private sphere. It typically ignores the crucial fact that the public sphere exists precisely because women's hidden labour in the household sphere enables it to. Women rarely have autonomous status as full citizens, with control over their labour, sexuality and fertility. Significant aspects of public policy in the South, for example, the structuring the "minimum" or "family" wage, are based on the patriarchal assumption of female dependency. This assumption together with the assignment of the major part of household production and all of household reproduction to women, leads to real and crippling constraints on a woman's ability to cross the boundary of the private sphere into the public, and play any sort of empowered role therein (for example, see Kusakabe 2003). The public sphere becomes the sphere of human activity and rights, while the private sphere is the sexually differentiated one. As the State retreats from the social sector, as capital's stranglehold increases, and as community structures that might have earlier provided a modicum of social support are fragmented, the enormous intensification of work is left increasingly to women to handle.

For the human rights approach in the fisheries to be effective, it must engage with several questions. First, how would it negotiate the issue of private property in ways that are fundamentally any different from those of privatised rights regimes? Second, would the human rights paradigm not facilitate community elites to gain for themselves ownership over what were earlier common/shared property resources? Third, how would it protect against the exploitation of women and other marginalised sections within fishing communities, and related to this, how would it accommodate the human rights of the poor outside the traditional fishing community, such as occasional fishers? And finally, how can the human rights framework address the specific nature of gender-based oppression and exploitation when its very formulation is based upon the denial of the private sphere, the primary site of this oppression and exploitation?

4 The Emergence of Community

Fishing communities have occupied the coastlines for generations. However, the idea of community emerged from two different locations at two different points in time. The first, the community as a political construct emerged from the struggles of fishing communities, threatened by development, and fighting to retain

their rights in the face of imminent dispossession and displacement. The second, the community as an institutional construct and an artefact of global policy, was the outcome of the institutionalised response to these struggles. This is a very important distinction but one that is increasingly blurred in real life, the role of aid being central to the blurring of this difference.

The rights of fishing communities have been articulated historically through a political context of resistance. This is not to claim that such community struggles were always democratic or even that they represented the demands of all sections of the community. However, since the late 1980s onwards there has also been a second articulation, emerging from the institutionalisation of the community into an artefact of global policy. Development, viewed and resisted until now as a top-down and illegitimate project by communities, had to be recast in more acceptable terms. The community had to be convinced that it was just one among many "stakeholders" of the contested coasts.

Other reasons for the institutionalisation of the concept of community could be found in the model of modernisation promoted in the years following the Washington Consensus. As the State in countries of the global South began withdrawing from regulation, the discourse began to revolve increasingly around privatising all forms of regulation including that of natural resource management. Since the decade of the 1990s, models of co-management and community-based coastal resource management began to spread in the fisheries. It is significant, however, that the few positive reports of such experiments in community-based coastal resource management remain largely in the realm of pilot projects supported extensively by donor aid (Quist et al 2008).

Industry, in the context of a retreating state, had to deal with a new reality of increased private participation in the social sector. Roles that were earlier performed by government, for example, drafting regulatory norms or providing disaster relief, were now being taken over by private bodies. Increasingly, this included the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector. Market-oriented policies received national legitimacy as well as the rubber stamp of civil-society representation with the participation of NGOs. As a result, NGOs came under pressure to surrender what little oppositional role they had to align with the dominant ideology. Wittingly or unwittingly, they became instrumental for pushing neo-liberalism into local administrative institutions. As Petras (1997) argues in the context of South America: "As the neoliberal regimes at the top devastated communities by inundating the country with cheap imports, extracting external debt payment, abolishing labour legislation, and creating a growing mass of low-paid and unemployed workers, the NGOs were funded to provide 'self-help' projects, 'popular education', and job training, to temporarily absorb small groups of poor, to co-opt local leaders, and to undermine anti-system struggles".

Another important factor in augmenting the role of community during the period of the 1990s was the growth of identity politics. Under the impact of the aggressive penetration of capital, aided by the State, the fishing community of the global South began to be pulled into the mainstream in a manner that alienated it from its traditional means of survival. It was now forced to begin fighting for a piece of the development pie. In the contested political arena, a hardening of community boundaries along lines of

identity began to take place. In the case of Kerala, for example, being born in a fishing caste, irrespective of whether one was an actual fisher or not, was sought to be made the primary criterion for access to fishery resources, the “renewal of the caste card” ensuring the rise of absentee ownership (Kurien 2005: 87).

The assertion of traditional identity was mediated however by modern compulsions. In some cases this led to the democratisation of old community forms. In Galicia, Spain, the changing historical context forced the centuries-old and traditionally male-run *cofradía* to accommodate women shellfish-collectors (Meltzoff 1995). In Kanyakumari, the fishing community’s claim to local identity and rights was tied to citizenship and the exercise of state power to protect their mode of fishing (Subramanian 2009). While community identity could thus be a vibrant mobilising force, it also affected the ways in which the women’s question was articulated in this period.

In fishery-related advocacy, women’s rights began to be increasingly articulated as community rights. The World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF), for example, asserted that it was important to “ensure that our sector is not weakened by dividing it, putting men on one side and women on the other, in a context where increasingly small-scale fishers from the North and South are having to abandon their way of life due to the impact of government policies which favour industrial fisheries interests” (Le Sauze 2000). The suggestion that the fishing sector would be weakened if women were to organise around their own issues was reminiscent of the strong opposition from the Left several decades ago to the idea of women organising autonomously on the grounds that this would divide working class struggles. Civil society statements from the fishery sector reflect a loss of focus on women’s rights by failing to directly address the basis of women’s oppression within the family and community. For example, in the absence of any fundamental questioning of oppressive community structures, the call to “protect the cultural identities, dignity and traditional rights of fishing communities and indigenous peoples” (Bangkok Statement on Small-Scale Fisheries 2008) could in fact have negative consequences for vulnerable groups, such as women or the poor or the sexuality minorities, that have been historically denied their rights as part of the traditional mores of the community.

As economic reforms rapidly alter the contours of the fisheries, women pulled into new forms of work confront a mixed bag of experiences with new opportunities sometimes allowing an escape from oppressive traditional practices. Despite the exploitative working conditions that migrant women workers from Kerala working seasonally in the commercial fish processing industry in far-off Gujarat face, they report earning better wages and feeling less discriminated as against men than did their counterparts engaged in home-based fish processing in Kerala (Centre for Social Research nd). Women in India’s Sunderbans district who are earning a decent wage today as a result of commercial prawn seed collection, report experiencing a sense of liberation from the exploitation of feudal and patriarchal landlords in whose fields they had laboured for generations (Jalais 2009). In other parts of the South too, such as Ghana, motorisation and technological change have brought empowering opportunities for certain sections of women (Overå 2005). However, even as waged work helps to improve women’s status and bargaining power within the household,

it introduces to their lives a punishing double burden since housework continues to be primarily women’s responsibility.

Communities are not static but rapidly changing in response to capital’s growth. In the global South, the changing context includes a retreating state, a bitterly-contested and threatened and rapidly-depleting natural resource base, intensification of labour and diminishing social support – a situation that has grave and specific, gender-determined impacts on women. For example, the National Fishworkers Forum (NFF) in India has justified its shift to caste-based identity politics on the grounds that fishworkers as a caste/community must unite to get their share of mainstream development. However, as Nayak (2005: 42) points out: “The minute that caste identities are called into play, the old social and cultural norms that have subjugated women are also revived, and any attempt to raise feminist positions or to talk about an alternative development paradigm is jeopardised”.

In fishing communities in the South women are increasingly moving into wage labour and finding access to independent economic means. Governments are also being forced to recognise, even if only to pay lip service to, the idea of women’s rights, which is bolstered further through NGO interventions. It is therefore becoming inevitable for communities to respond to women both not just as part of community structures, but also as individuals. How, in this context, would women’s rights that derive from gender and citizenship be reconciled with practices that result from entrenched power structures within communities such as those of religion, sexuality, race, caste or class?

5 Growing Aid Dependence

Aid has played a significant role in the spread of the ideology of globalisation and the spread of “free trade”. If free trade is regarded as capital’s iron fist, then aid may be seen as the velvet glove that sheaths it. Among global institutions, the synergies of the Big Three – the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO – have created what has been described as a “single global institution governing the world economy, whose three parts specialise in stabilisation (IMF), structural adjustment (World Bank) and trade liberalisation (WTO)”, cooperating closely to forge a “coherent, unifying policy position, increasingly centred on what they take to be their most convincing theme – free trade” (Peet 2003: 201). The agenda of free trade is central to the liberalisation agenda pushed directly through aid. Aid and trade are thus deeply and inextricably linked.

In the fisheries, donor aid was tied to conditionalities promoting modernisation and industrialisation, spreading a destructive model of development in the marine and culture fisheries widely in the global South. Worldwide fisheries subsidies are estimated at \$30 to \$34 billion annually, the majority of which goes to industrial fisheries (Jacquet and Pauly 2008). Export-led growth has been followed so aggressively that the fisheries today is “one of the most highly globalised economic sectors” (LeSann 1998 cf Neis et al 2005). According to the FAO, in 2009, 37% of fish was exported out of the country of origin. The value of exports for 2008, at \$102 billion, was two-thirds more than exports in 2000. Fish is thus the fastest-growing cash crop with increases in trade mostly fuelled by industrial aquaculture (FAO 2008). In 2008, Japan, the US and the EU received 70% of all fish exports from

developing countries, which are now the largest exporters of fish and fish products. The net figures in export showed a sharp rising trend, from \$7.2 billion in 1996 to \$27 billion in 2008, a nearly 300% increase indicating the huge transfer of an extremely important source of protein for the common people, from the South to the North (FAO 2008). Global fish exports transfer fish from the poor consumer's plate in the South to the rich consumer's plate in the North (Béné et al 2010). This unequal transfer will only intensify in the years to come as economies like China and India begin to import rather than export fish (Ahmed 2006).

In the fisheries, aid agencies acted on behalf of capital in two stages. In the first stage, they provided a politically acceptable route for capital investments and in the second, they became the vehicle for comprehensive privatisation. Early aid in the fisheries was routed through national governments. Thus, in the 1950s, capital was poured into offshore bottom trawlers and distant water fleets in industrialised countries, while, in the South, inter-governmental aid assisted the modernisation of craft and gear. By the early 1980s, a southern debt crisis triggered by overspending became capital's opportunity to expand to new sites. Southern markets had to be speedily opened up but inter-governmental aid as earlier decades had demonstrated contained inherent drag factors, impeding the direct flow of capital with regulations to be bypassed and bureaucracy to be humoured. The Washington Consensus of the 1980s, crafted by the World Bank, the IMF and the US Treasury, sought to eliminate governmental controls on capital flows. For this, aid was the most expedient route. Even as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO influenced national governments to liberalise trade and capital flows, to deregulate, privatise and specialise in fishery exports (MacDonald 2005), an extraordinary consensus emerged around neo-liberal economic growth. Aid agencies, in the second stage, cleared the path for privatisation by helping to establish hegemony.

Gender empowerment and mainstreaming became a necessary component of every project plan. The "greening of investments" became paramount. Policy elites in southern countries drafted national environmental plans in consultation with banks. Environmental NGOs drafted the project documentation associated with loans for aquaculture, coastal management, forestry, mining and agriculture. At the same time, the privatisation of all regulation, including that of natural resource management, was vigorously pursued. In the fisheries, the notions of co-management, and later, community-based coastal resource management gained currency. Aid flowed into capacity-building and skills training for community-based organisations and networks that worked directly with indigenous groups and natural resource-based communities. Regulation, which might restrict industrial growth, was increasingly replaced by management-based models involving consensus among so-called civil society stakeholders in matters of coastal zone, marine and biodiversity protection. At the same time, globally, income disparities rose and food and oil prices spiralled out of control. To manage the growing livelihood alienation and growing political unrest, these years saw the growth of the poverty and livelihood discourse throughout the global South.

By the turn of the millennium, it became clear that the objectives of the Washington Consensus were more or less achieved.

Over the period 1996 to 2004, although all other forms of development aid flattened out, aid for governance and the rule of law increased steadily from 10% in 1996 to 45% in 2004 (World Bank 2005). This indicated that economic restructuring was largely in place in the global South, with only minor hurdles remaining in the path of complete deregulation and free trade (Tandon 2008). It now became critical for capital to consolidate its hold over the newly emerging markets in the South.

Privatisation, Targeting of Aid

In the last 10 years or so, capital has therefore pushed for two things: one, the privatisation of regulation to ensure industry-friendly norms, and two, the targeting of aid to attenuate the miseries of global capitalism. The success of both programmes – privatisation and targeted aid – depends however on efficient management and delivery systems. The capitalist agenda has therefore shifted to "good governance", and the alignment of aid with national priorities is the focus of the Paris Declaration of 2005, widely endorsed by donor agencies and state governments. This rationale informs a range of global policy instruments, for example, the Millennium Development Goals. However, such marketisation of governance is expected to only sharpen the existing divisions between the poor, who would be left clamouring to somehow fit inclusionary criteria, leading to the further hardening of identity politics across all sections of the poor, including fishing communities.

The huge expansion of industry in the last few decades has completely restructured economic relations in the fishing sector. Today fish is largely produced by the poor and consumed by the rich. With the global rise of the "environmental state" (Goldman 2005), notions of labour and illegitimate surplus value have been largely replaced by the idea of environmental destruction. The poor and the marginalised are seen less as an exploited labour force than as the natural custodians of the environment. The locus of struggle moving away in this manner from class to ecological sustainability represents the consolidation of opposition to the present form of development, and the development of a sharp and much-needed critique of the industrialisation model of economic development embraced by both capitalism and socialism. However, it has the definite weakness of blurring class distinctions among those opposed to industrialisation. It importantly downplays distinctions between imperatives in the North and the South; it downplays also the connection between the growing impoverishment of the South and the increased accumulation of wealth in the North.

The relinquishing of the class perspective has heralded a new era of political concord. NGOs today, at best, offer only the weakest opposition, and, at worst, embrace the development agenda set by capital. As far as labour is concerned, the role of the NGO is restricted to addressing only the issue of labour's survival. Increasingly unaddressed is the need for a politically powerful labour power which is able to negotiate for greater justice and equality. Women's labour has been mobilised at an unprecedented scale and concentrated in the most exploitative jobs to fuel economic growth in the fisheries. Even as the industrial fisheries thrives on the labour of poor women, new analyses and new forms of organising are needed to fundamentally challenge this exploitation. Capital cannot be left unfettered to do as it pleases,

but must be forced through stringent regulation to heed other considerations apart from profitability alone. Donor aid is however driving the NGO increasingly towards conciliatory, mediatory roles, incapable of seeking solutions outside the framework of capital.

Community-based forms of mobilisation thus face many challenges. Can communities form their own market mechanisms that are not modelled after capitalist forms, and evolve non-cash-based economies? Can they demand for the regulation of capital and its relations with both people and the environment? Can they collectivise the ownership of property and the means of production, ensuring the rights of those who labour while delegitimising the profits of the profiteers? Can they address the rights of the non-fishing poor? Can housework be collectivised? Will the full

labour of women be recognised and valued? Can labour struggles in the fisheries go beyond the issue of labour's survival alone and address the need for a politically powerful labour power which is able to negotiate for greater justice and equality? Can women's fertility and sexuality be freed from the institutions of family and private property? Can the analytical and political clarity required for such agendas come solely from identity-based politics? Similarly, would identity-based politics ever tolerate the struggle against patriarchy? Would it not necessarily require bringing back an emphasis on class together with other structures of oppression and exploitation such as patriarchy, race, caste, sexuality, and so on? Is not the radical re-envisioning of gender politics an urgent necessity of our times?

NOTES

- 1 The definition of the small-scale fisheries differs greatly across different regions. This paper adopts the approach suggested by Mathew (2007: 7): "It can be assumed that artisanal and small-scale fisheries, in general, refer to the smallest viable fishing units in a country or a province, with downward or lateral compatibility in fishing gear operation".
- 2 This paper uses the terms "North" or "global North" and "South" or "global South" to denote blocs of high and low economic development respectively.

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