

HUMAN RIGHTS IN INDIAN SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES: INSIGHTS FROM A SOCIAL ECONOMY MAPPING OF GENDERED WORK IN A DRIED FISH VALUE CHAIN IN VALSAD

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The SSF Guidelines are explicitly rooted in the realization of a human rights–based approach to governing and developing small-scale fisheries value chains. In contextualizing international human rights standards to the case of small-scale fisheries, the Guidelines recognize that these value chains are embedded in traditional systems, reflect legal pluralism, and are shaped by power imbalances between and among actors. One of the 13 guiding principles mentioned in the Guidelines is ‘gender equality and equity’ with an acknowledgment of the role played by women in small-scale fisheries value chains. A key aspect of the human rights–based approach is the identification and prioritization of the unique barriers faced by marginalized and vulnerable individuals, communities, and groups and the commitment to addressing these barriers in their daily struggles. Therefore, operationalizing the SSF Guidelines and implementing human rights through policy, advocacy, or legal action requires context-sensitive and gender-sensitive approaches that specifically identify and prioritize vulnerable and marginalized actors within small-scale fisheries value chains.

Dried Fish Matters’ social economy approach is one such approach providing context-specific, actor-oriented and gender-sensitive insights through mapping of dried fish value chains. This paper explores how using this approach to map one localized dried fish value chain in Valsad, India, has helped to identify the unique barriers and challenges to human rights faced by women in the processing and retail segments. This paper draws on findings from six months of field research conducted as part of my master’s study, followed by validation research, on a coast-to- forest dried fish value chain.

Localized dried fish economies like the one in Valsad are generally absent from meaningful policy discourse in Gujarat, largely because the small-scale fisheries that sustain them are overlooked in the State’s export-oriented image of fisheries and in its push for port-based industrialization. The consequences of this neglect are felt differently and often unequally by actors in the dried fish value chain. For example, women processors and retailers face disproportionate challenges in exercising their rights to health, sanitation, and market access. These challenges faced by women processors and retailers are further exacerbated by an intersection of factors such as caste, place of origin, social status, economic status, and linguistic identity. The barriers to human rights in such contexts are therefore not only confined to formal institutions but also deeply gendered, intersecting with caste, language, and migration status, and the power imbalances that result from them. Through insights generated by mapping the value chain using a social economy lens, this paper further explains how recognition of these situated barriers enables the implementation of human rights not only through targeted gender-sensitive public policy by duty-bearers, but also by highlighting where civil society action can most effectively contribute to human rights realization.