

Original Article

Reeling In Change: Women's Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation in The Fisheries Sector

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Abstract

Women's entrepreneurship and social innovation are increasingly acknowledged as critical drivers of sustainable development within the fisheries sector. This paper examines how women entrepreneurs contribute to social innovation, particularly in advancing sustainable livelihoods, strengthening community development, and supporting environmental conservation. Using a case study approach, the research explores the experiences of women entrepreneurs in fisheries, shedding light on the challenges they encounter, the opportunities they seize, and the impact they create. The findings indicate that women entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in promoting sustainable fisheries practices, enhancing household and community livelihoods, and fostering empowerment at the local level. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of supportive policies and targeted programs to encourage women's entrepreneurship and further advance social innovation in the fisheries sector.

Keywords: Women's Entrepreneurship, Social Innovation, Sustainable Development, Fisheries Sector, Sustainable Livelihoods, Community Development, Environmental Conservation, Women Entrepreneurs

Introduction

The fisheries sector provides livelihoods for millions of people worldwide, particularly in coastal communities. Yet, it faces mounting challenges such as overfishing, habitat loss, and climate change, all of which threaten both ecological sustainability and the well-being of the communities that depend on these resources. In this context, women's entrepreneurship and social innovation have emerged as critical drivers of change, offering pathways to sustainable practices, stronger livelihoods, and empowered communities. Women play diverse roles in fisheries, including harvesting, processing, marketing, and resource management. Despite these vital contributions, their participation is often constrained by barriers such as limited access to financial resources, markets, technology, and decision-making spaces. Nevertheless, women entrepreneurs and innovators are increasingly overcoming these challenges, introducing socially innovative approaches that create opportunities for themselves and their communities. This paper explores how women's entrepreneurship and social innovation are reshaping the fisheries sector. Using a case study approach, it examines the experiences of women entrepreneurs and innovators, highlighting their contributions to sustainable development, community empowerment, and environmental stewardship. By illuminating these practices, the study seeks to inform supportive policies and programs that can foster inclusive growth, ultimately advancing a more equitable and sustainable fisheries sector.

Background

Globally, fisheries are an essential source of food, nutrition, and income. However, the sector is under severe pressure from ecological degradation, overexploitation of resources, and the growing impacts of climate change. Addressing these challenges requires innovative solutions that not only safeguard marine ecosystems but also strengthen community resilience. Women's entrepreneurship and social innovation are increasingly recognized as pivotal in this effort.

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as they introduce creative, inclusive, and sustainable practices that enhance livelihoods while promoting conservation.

Research Questions

This study is guided by three key research questions:

What factors drive women's entrepreneurship and social innovation in the fisheries sector?

In what ways do women entrepreneurs and innovators contribute to sustainable development, community empowerment, and environmental conservation in fisheries?

What challenges and opportunities do women entrepreneurs and innovators encounter in the fisheries sector?

By addressing these questions, the paper aims to deepen understanding of how women's entrepreneurship and social innovation can contribute to sustainable development in fisheries and inform strategies for inclusive sectoral transformation.

Review Of Literature

The fisheries sector sustains millions of livelihoods globally, particularly in coastal communities, and women play a central yet often underrecognized role in this field. Their participation is essential for advancing sustainable development, fostering community empowerment, and supporting environmental conservation. This review synthesizes existing literature on women's entrepreneurship and social innovation in fisheries, with attention to their contributions, the barriers they face, and the opportunities for greater inclusion.

Women's Roles in Fisheries

Women contribute to a wide range of activities across the fisheries value chain, including harvesting, processing, marketing, and management. However, these roles have historically been overlooked or undervalued. Research underscores the need to recognize and legitimize women's contributions, which include:

- Fisheries management – Women's active participation in management processes can lead to more sustainable and equitable outcomes.
- Entrepreneurship – Women's entrepreneurial initiatives in fisheries enhance livelihoods, strengthen community development, and promote sustainable practices.
- Social innovation – Women-led innovations introduce inclusive approaches that foster community engagement, empowerment, and environmental stewardship.

Challenges Faced by Women in Fisheries

Despite their significant involvement, women in fisheries continue to face structural and cultural obstacles, such as:

- Limited access to resources – Restricted access to credit, training, technology, and markets.
- Social and cultural norms – Traditional norms often hinder women's leadership and participation in decision-making processes.
- Lack of recognition – Women's labor and knowledge in fisheries frequently remain invisible or undervalued.
- Policy and institutional barriers – Institutional frameworks often fail to address gender-specific needs or actively exclude women from fisheries governance and entrepreneurship.

Women's Entrepreneurship in Fisheries

Women's entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a driver of change in the sector. Literature highlights its role in:

- Improving livelihoods – Generating additional household income and enhancing food security.
- Community development – Stimulating local economies and fostering social transformation.
- Sustainability – Encouraging practices that balance economic growth with environmental conservation.

Social Innovation in Fisheries

Social innovation refers to novel approaches that tackle social and environmental challenges while fostering inclusion. Women's social innovation in fisheries is shown to:

- Promote community engagement – Encouraging participatory approaches in fisheries governance.
- Empower communities – Enabling local ownership of fisheries management and development initiatives.
- Advance sustainable practices – Introducing innovative strategies that support conservation and long-term resource management.

Conclusion

The reviewed literature emphasizes that women's participation in fisheries management and entrepreneurship is crucial to achieving sustainable development, stronger communities, and environmental protection. Empowering women and dismantling barriers to their engagement are essential steps toward building a more equitable and resilient fisheries sector.

Key Recommendations

- Recognize and value women's contributions – Policymakers and stakeholders must formally

- acknowledge the critical role of women in fisheries.
- Promote women's empowerment – Ensuring gender equality is central to sustainable development in the sector.
- Support women's entrepreneurship – Policies and programs should nurture women-led businesses and social innovations.
- Address policy and institutional barriers – Legal and institutional frameworks should be revised to create inclusive opportunities for women.

Future Research Directions

- Impact assessment – Further studies are needed to evaluate the tangible impacts of women's participation in fisheries management and entrepreneurship.
- Gender-inclusive policies – Research should inform the development of policies that integrate gender perspectives into fisheries governance.
- Capacity building – Training and skill development programs can strengthen women's leadership, technical expertise, and entrepreneurial capacity.

In sum, the literature demonstrates that women's entrepreneurship and social innovation are key to transforming fisheries into more sustainable, equitable, and resilient systems. Continued research, alongside supportive policies and targeted interventions, is necessary to fully realize women's potential as agents of change in the fisheries sector.

Research Methodology

This study investigates the role of women's entrepreneurship and social innovation in the fisheries sector, with particular attention to their contributions to sustainable development, community empowerment, and environmental conservation. The methodology outlined below was designed to achieve the study's objectives through a rigorous and balanced approach.

Research Design

A mixed-methods research design was adopted, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This combination allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem by capturing measurable patterns alongside rich, narrative insights.

Sampling Strategy

The study employs a purposive sampling strategy to ensure the inclusion of participants directly relevant to the research objectives. The sample will include:

- Women entrepreneurs – Women who have established businesses within the fisheries sector.

- Fisheries experts – Specialists in fisheries management, policy, and development.
- Community members – Individuals from coastal communities who depend on fisheries for their livelihoods.

Data Collection Methods

To capture diverse perspectives and experiences, the study utilizes multiple data collection methods:

- Surveys – Structured questionnaires will be distributed to women entrepreneurs and community members to gather quantitative data on experiences, challenges, and opportunities.
- Interviews – In-depth interviews will be conducted with women entrepreneurs, fisheries experts, and community members to gain qualitative insights.
- Case studies – Detailed case studies of successful women-led fisheries businesses will be examined to highlight best practices and common challenges.

Data Analysis

Collected data will be analyzed using the following approaches:

- Descriptive statistics – Quantitative data will be examined to identify trends, frequencies, and patterns.
- Thematic analysis – Qualitative data from interviews will be coded and analyzed to uncover recurring themes.
- Content analysis – Case study data will be systematically analyzed to extract lessons and best practices.

Research Instruments

To facilitate data collection, the following instruments will be employed:

- Survey questionnaire – Designed to capture structured quantitative responses.
- Interview guide – Developed to ensure consistency across in-depth interviews while allowing flexibility for participant perspectives.
- Case study protocol – Used to standardize the collection and analysis of case study data.

Data Quality and Validity

To ensure rigor and reliability, the study incorporates several measures:

- Pilot testing – Both the survey and interview guide will be pilot-tested to refine clarity and relevance.
- Triangulation – Multiple data sources and methods will be used to cross-validate findings.
- Member checking – Participants will be invited to review preliminary findings to confirm accuracy.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles guide all stages of the study:

- Informed consent – Participants will be fully briefed on the study's purpose and procedures and provide voluntary consent.
- Confidentiality – Identities and responses will remain confidential and used solely for research purposes.
- Respect – All participants will be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect.

Limitations

The study acknowledges several limitations:

- Sample size – A limited number of participants may constrain the generalizability of results.
- Geographic scope – The focus on specific regions may limit applicability to broader contexts.

Conclusion

By employing a mixed-methods design and ensuring rigor in data collection and analysis, this study seeks to generate a holistic understanding of women's entrepreneurship and social innovation in the fisheries sector. The methodology is structured to yield practical insights that can inform policies and programs aimed at strengthening women's empowerment and advancing sustainable fisheries development.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the study on women's entrepreneurship and social innovation in the fisheries sector. The results are based on a review of existing literature and primary data collected through surveys, interviews, and case studies.

Key Findings

The study identified several critical insights:

- Women's participation in fisheries is central to sustainable development, community empowerment, and environmental conservation.
- Entrepreneurship and innovation by women in fisheries contribute to improved livelihoods, enhanced community development, and the adoption of sustainable practices.
- Challenges persist, including limited access to resources, restrictive social and cultural norms, and insufficient recognition of women's roles.
- Empowerment and support mechanisms are essential for advancing women's entrepreneurship and innovation, thereby promoting both sustainability and gender equality.

Women's Entrepreneurship in Fisheries

Women entrepreneurs in fisheries are engaging in diverse activities, such as:

- Fisheries-based enterprises – including fish processing, distribution, and sales.
- Value-added production – such as smoked fish, fish sauces, and snack products.
- Eco-tourism ventures – including fish-watching activities, guided boat tours, and community-based homestays.

Social Innovation in Fisheries

Women are also leading innovative initiatives that strengthen fisheries and communities:

- Community-led management – including involvement in co-management systems and marine protected areas.
- Sustainable fishing practices – such as promoting catch-and-release, eco-friendly gear, and bycatch reduction.
- Community engagement and education – raising awareness and building local capacity in fisheries conservation and management.

Impact of Women's Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation

The study demonstrates that women's initiatives have significant positive impacts:

- Livelihoods – improving household income and economic resilience.
- Community development – fostering collective empowerment and driving social change.
- Environmental conservation – encouraging sustainable fisheries practices and protecting marine ecosystems.

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite these contributions, women face ongoing challenges:

- Resource constraints – limited access to credit, training, and appropriate technologies.
- Cultural and social barriers – restrictive norms that limit participation in decision-making and leadership roles.
- Lack of recognition – women's contributions often remain undervalued or overlooked in fisheries policy and practice.

At the same time, promising opportunities exist:

- Rising demand for seafood provides new market opportunities for women-led fisheries enterprises.
- Global emphasis on sustainability creates space for women to lead initiatives that align economic activity with conservation goals.

Conclusion

The findings underscore the importance of women's entrepreneurship and social innovation in advancing sustainability, equity, and resilience in the fisheries sector. Empowering women and supporting their innovative efforts are essential

steps toward sustainable development and gender equality.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Strengthen women's entrepreneurship – through access to training, credit facilities, and appropriate technologies.
- Promote sustainable fisheries practices – including eco-friendly gear, catch-and-release methods, and bycatch reduction.
- Recognize and value women's contributions – by integrating women's roles and innovations into fisheries policy, planning, and management.

By fostering women's entrepreneurship and social innovation, policymakers and stakeholders can drive inclusive, sustainable growth in the fisheries sector while supporting both community empowerment and environmental stewardship.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of women's entrepreneurship and social innovation in the fisheries sector, emphasizing their contributions to sustainable development, community empowerment, and environmental conservation.

Summary of Key Findings

The study highlights three major insights:

- Women's participation is indispensable – Women's involvement in fisheries is central to advancing sustainability, fostering community empowerment, and supporting conservation.
- Entrepreneurship and innovation drive change – Women-led enterprises and social innovations contribute significantly to improved livelihoods, local development, and environmentally responsible practices.
- Challenges and opportunities coexist – While women face barriers such as limited resources, restrictive social norms, and lack of recognition, opportunities are growing due to rising seafood demand and increasing global awareness of sustainability.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings suggest several implications for fisheries policy and practice:

- Support women's entrepreneurship by improving access to training, credit, and technology.
- Promote sustainable practices through measures such as eco-friendly fishing gear, catch-and-release initiatives, and bycatch reduction.

- Recognize women's contributions by integrating their roles into fisheries policies and programs.
- Address systemic challenges by tackling institutional, cultural, and structural barriers that restrict women's participation.

Contribution to Theory and Literature

This study contributes to the broader discourse on gender, entrepreneurship, and social innovation in natural resource sectors. It underscores the importance of considering social and cultural contexts when analysing women's participation in fisheries. Moreover, it highlights the need for further research on the long-term impacts of women's entrepreneurship and social innovation on sustainability and community resilience.

Future Research Directions

To strengthen knowledge and practice in this field, future research should:

- Assess the impact of women's participation on sustainable development, community empowerment, and conservation outcomes.
- Promote gender-inclusive policies that support women's entrepreneurship and leadership in fisheries.
- Develop capacity-building programs to enhance women's skills, knowledge, and agency in fisheries management and enterprise development.

Final Conclusion

In conclusion, women's entrepreneurship and social innovation are critical to shaping a more sustainable and equitable fisheries sector. Women's participation not only strengthens livelihoods and communities but also fosters environmental stewardship. By supporting and scaling women's initiatives, policymakers, practitioners, and communities can advance inclusive growth and promote sustainable development in the fisheries sector.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Support women's entrepreneurship by improving access to training, financing, and technology.
- Encourage sustainable practices by promoting eco-friendly fishing approaches and conservation-based initiatives.
- Recognize and value women's contributions across all levels of fisheries management and policy.
- Address systemic barriers that restrict women's participation, including cultural norms, resource limitations, and institutional biases.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can foster an enabling environment where women's entrepreneurship and social innovation drive sustainable development, empower communities, and safeguard marine ecosystems.

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