

Shrimp Seed-fly Catcher Women

Mr. Mizanur Rahman (Bangladesh)

The village women and girls are traditionally housewives involved in cooking foods; rearing children; caring elders; collecting cooking woods; cow dung; straws for kitchen; drinking water from ponds; as well as managing domestic livestock's, poultry etc. But after the introduction of commercial shrimp culture using saline water in agro based paddy fields, the fortune of the women and girls became somewhat bright from an economic point of view. They became shrimp seed collector or fry catchers in rivers flows from the mangrove forest of Sundarban. Women became the catalytic agents of shrimp culture. They also engaged in cleaning grass and other weeds from the muddy beds as well as fry selling. Thus, socio-economically illiterate women became foreign currency earners through global shrimp exports. Now they are regarded as an economic factor in the family and the community. Even they can earn at least \$ 3 to 10 a day during full tidal flows from the sea. Baby boomer poor women are now earning money, being empowered automatically due to the flourishing of shrimp industries.

In the early 1980s, the shrimp culture began around greater Khula Division in saline water. At that time, rivers were the only source of shrimp seed-fry. The key players are women and girls, who collect the shrimp seeds, fry and sell them to Seed agents and shrimp farm growers. This shrimp business started small but now

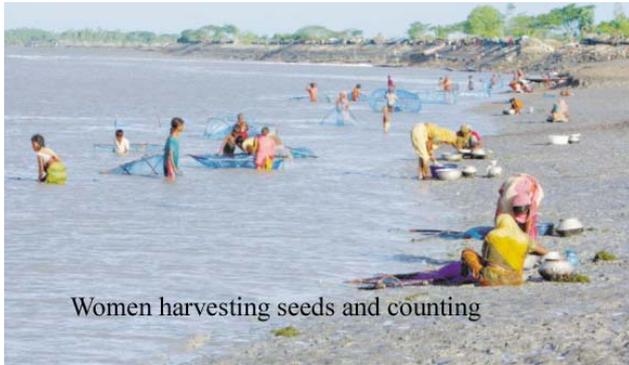


Woman catching shrimp seed-fry in river

became a giant industry in the coastal belts on the Bay of Bengal from West Bengal of India towards Myanmar. This is also the practice in India.

The involvement of women in the shrimp sector needs to be recognized as empowering them and providing them a viable option for sustainable livelihoods. Women are participating in various activities related to shrimp seed collection; selling; cleaning of shrimp growing beds, specifically at the production level and in the shrimp processing industrial plants.

The shrimp culture linked women folk are a new emerging group in society and family. This gives them a say in the rural community, aquaculture, local government council and government. However, they need to organize them in a common platform of strengthening framework for gaining proper prices for their collected shrimp fry from sea going rivers; justified labor for grass-weed extraction and hard labor for grading,



Women harvesting seeds and counting

making different types of quality shrimps, measuring and carrying these fries. Besides, as the real grassroots level player of the shrimp industry, they need to formulate networks for their equal wages like males; safety at rivers, health care, reproductive health treatment facilities etc to promote this global

lucrative export business. Consequently, it is necessary to focus on their basic rights and how they can be achieved through media focus, advocacy, lobbying and citizen's campaigns.

NGOs feel the crying need for the forming of alliance of those women and girls linked to the shrimp industry. This is because these women and girls. This is because these women and girls collect shrimp seed-fly from rivers where dangers like sharks, crocodiles and snakes. Also they could be washed away by tidal flowers, waves, and storms, health hazards and or drown in rivers anytime. A strong women's watchdog group needs to emerge for to protect the rights of these women.

NGO activists appeal to the government; the Shrimp Exporters Association; Members of the Parliament (MP) and the local Union Council Chairman to ensure their basic fundamental human rights. Citizens make demands to ILO, EU and WB to keep close eyes on the issues associated with women and the shrimp industry so that the latter can get back their proper wages for their toil and hard labor like men do.

Women and girls are providing hard labor and working for a long time, but getting less pay, on the other hand. Shrimp growers and exporters receive lucrative amounts of foreign currency but the key players get small amounts. The women get lesser than their male counterparts. Specifically, e.g.; women receive \$ 1.5 to males \$ 4. The earnest focus and initiatives of the government for the betterment of women, for example, schooling for their kids; training on better catching; health support and food rights, are essential for these marginalized poverty stricken women.