Coping with informal fish vending constraints and resilience implications among urban-based women fish vendors in Dar es Salaam

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine threats related to informal fish vending business among urban-based women and to propose strategies for overcoming the threats. Specifically, the study ascertains the threats associated with the fishing business and strategies for coping and the capacity to cope. Based on the multi-layered social resilience framework, this study used a qualitative design and a sample size of 30 participants obtained both randomly and purposively. The findings revealed that threats experienced by the vendors include stigma, fish scarcity, higher fish prices, inadequate business capital, various forms of gender-related violence such as sexual harassment, lack of legal status, and various forms of crime including robbery, theft, and pickpocketing. Findings further indicated that vendors managed to develop both reactive and proactive strategies for coping with the threats. Reactive strategies include joining small self-helping groups popularly known as Village Community Banking (VICOBA) and soliciting family and relative support against insecurity threats. Proactive strategies include securing business financing from credible institutions, business diversification and adopting new kinds of business, business registration and licensing, searching for and participating in education and capacity-building programs, as well as business advocacy. It is recommended that government support, provision of education, and access to credit, should be considered in supporting women fish vendors to cope with the threats in their fishing business activities.

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Introduction

Urban fish vending has become a critical source of livelihood for a significant population of urban dwellers, particularly in rapidly growing cities like Dar es Salaam. The rising urban population has led to increased demand for food, including fish products, creating a substantial market base for various commodities. Consequently, informal fish vending has emerged as an employment opportunity for many individuals, providing them with a reasonable income and contributing to the local economy (URT, 2016). Tanzania’s national population census conducted in 2022 indicated that 30% of the approximately 61,741,120 million people live in urban areas and food is highly required (NBS, 2022). To supply enough food that provides nutritious products to the rapidly growing population in Dar es Salaam fishing and trade on fisheries products should play a major role in the livelihoods of urban dwellers ((Harper et al 2020; Kleiber et al 2015; Fröcklin et al., 2013; Getu et al., 2015). This further suggests that the presence of this population is a market base of various commodities including fish and other related products. In order to supply number of fish in the required quantity, a reasonable number of people have seen fish vending as an employment opportunity to them and have been making a reasonable income out of this activity (Weeratunge et al., 2014; Issa, Mazana, Kirumirah, & Munishi (2022). In addition to providing employment opportunities for a substantial number of people, fish vending contributes significantly to the country’s economy ((Barsoum, 2021; Sambuo & Kirama, 2018; URT, 2016).
In Dar es Salaam, informal fish vending has become a common activity for women providing them with opportunities for economic empowerment. Several initiatives have been undertaken to support and improve informal fish vending in the city. Despite the fact that, the government grants have been extended to women vendors to provide an avenue for capital availability, majority have been unable to access the credit due to bureaucratic procedures (Karani, & Faillure, 2020). Moreover, fish vending kiosk has been set up to create employment opportunities to the family as well as the community. In addition to that the establishment of the Tanzania Women Fish Workers Association (TAWFA) and the development of the National Fisheries Policies (NFS) of 2015 have aimed at promoting gender mainstreaming, equity in resource access, and awareness in fisheries and aquaculture (Kimasa, 2013; FAO 2022).

Indeed, El-Azzazy (2019) found that women fish vendors do face street vending challenges and opportunities in Fayoum while Peke (2013), elaborated challenges faced by women fish vendor in Mumbai, however, none of these has been conducted in Ferry market Dar es Salaam. Therefore, this study aims at addressing this gap by attempting the following research question; what are the threats experienced by women fish vendors? what are coping strategies adopted by women vendors, and the implications for their resilience? By shedding light on the livelihood contributions of fishing activities among women and identifying barriers hindering their meaningful participation.

Above all, the study is organized as follows; literature review with theoretical and empirical studies and empirical studies that shed light on linkage between theory and practice. The third part contains the information on research methodology. After analysis and findings of the study, conclusion and recommendations are provided

Literature Review

This part of literature includes theoretical and empirical literature. It aims at discussing different studies undertaken previously by others in connection with the theory and to the topic and helps to obtain a gap for the current study.

Theoretical and Conceptual Background

This paper is guided by the multi-layered social resilience framework, which draws from various disciplines such as ecology, psychology, socio-anthropology, and sustainable livelihoods (Obrist, Pfeiffer, & Henley, 2010; Carpenter, et al, 2001 Holling, 1973; Luthar, 2003; Masten, 2001; Bourdieu, 1984; DFID, 2000). The framework emphasizes the examination of resilience building in relation to different threats and the competencies needed to address them. It suggests that actors can mobilize economic, social, and cultural capital to increase their power and ability to cope with threats (Obrist, et al 2010). The framework also distinguished between reactive capacities which are immediate responses to threat, and proactive capacities, which involve anticipating and planning for threats in advance. The framework highlights the importance of positive adjustment and learning in building resilience, particularly in challenging livelihood conditions. It recognizes different forms of capital, including social, economic, cultural, and symbolic as prerequisites for resilience building (Munishi & Casmir, 2019). The framework prompts researchers to be explicit about the specific threat or risk being examined and whether the affected individual or groups are aware of these threats. It also emphasizes the multi-layered nature of resilience building, involving networks at various levels, from individual to international (Obrist, et al 2010).

Furthermore, the framework takes a strengths-oriented approach, focusing on support from institutions, rather than a deficit approach that emphasizes risk and inability to cope. It promotes a positive perspective on the ability of urban food street vendors to adjust to threats such as evictions and reallocation framework (Dongus, Pfeiffer, Metta, 2010). Lastly the framework offers a solution-oriented and mitigation – focused approach, which can guide researchers and policy makers in identifying corrective measures to enhance the resilience of food street vendors in the face of evictions and reallocation.

Empirical Review

Threats associated with fish vending business among women fish vendors

One of the threats related to urban informal fish vending is related to vendors evictions and reallocations worldwide as evidenced in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. These continued evictions have enormously disturbed the business of the urban street vendors in urban areas (Kirumirah & Munishi, 2022; Munishi & Casmir, 2019). Urban fish vendors have also experienced fish scarcity due to the centralization of landing centres, unhealthy competition from newly entered fish merchants, and the new entrance of fish vending males in domestic markets (Kantor and Kruijssen, 2014, FAO 2022). Another threat has been exploitative practices at various stages of the fisheries business starting from shore to domestic market. This has been coupled with the absence of infrastructure and amenities in the fish marketplaces (Kantor and Kruijssen, 2014).

Other challenges experienced by the urban-based women fish vendors are harassment from various authorities, deflated fish prices, denial of public transportation, excessive rate of interest by money lenders, unhygienic market conditions, lack of facilities for rest and refreshment, and others (Munishi & Casmir, 2019). Due to the nature of their work, the fish-vending women are neither able to care for their children properly nor able to lead a peaceful family life (Issa, et al, 2022).

Women fish vendors are faced with an additional threat stemming from the lack of legal status as they have no license or registered vendors’ identification cards (Kantor and Kruijssen, 2014). Consequently, they lack secure claim to space from which to vend whether in markets or on streets. Another challenge is lack of access to credit through microfinance institutions or other support or
services (Munishi & Casmir, 2019). The vendors may as well be vulnerable to harassment and exploitation (Munishi & Casmir, 2019). Women involved in fish vending also face a threat of social stigma that emanates from a belief that fishing vending in some communities is mainly associated with men (Munishi & Casmir, 2019; Aswathy & Kalpana, 2018). In line with that fish vendors also are faced with lack of knowledge about financial institutions that are relevant for small business owners which are very few (Munishi & Casmir, 2019). Most financial institution deals with credit-worthy customers of which women fish vendors do not qualify for the loan. Inadequate education level plays a significant role in limiting women fish vendors from access to capital as well as a market for their product (Shayo, Munishi & Pastory, 2022). In most cases less support from the government impeded women’s fish vendors from coping with threat.

**Research Methodology**

**Study area**

The study was conducted in the Ferry Fish Selling Market located in the Ilala District of Dar es Salaam City, which is a well-known centre for oceanic fishes and fish products in the area.

**Study Design**

The study employed a qualitative design with a phenomenological inquiry strategy. This approach, as suggested by Creswell (2014), aimed to document the experiences of women fish vendors regarding the threats they face, their coping mechanisms, and the resilience implications within their specific context.

**Sampling Techniques and Data collection**

Convenient sampling was utilized to recruit fish vendors who were willing to share their views on the study topic. In-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 30 women fish vendors from the Ferry Fish Selling Market in Dar es Salaam. Probing questions were used when necessary to gather more detailed information. The researchers facilitated the discussions, allowing participants to contribute their ideas, while research assistants recorded the proceedings.

**Ethical consideration**

The study adhered to ethical principles for qualitative research. Permission was obtained from market authorities, and all responsible women fish vendors were informed about the research. Participants were informed about the research considerations prior to sharing their information. Ethical rules, including the right to remain anonymous and withdraw from the study, were upheld.

**Data analysis**

The gathered information from the interviews was transcribed and saved as text documents. Swahili transcriptions were then translated into English to facilitate analysis.

Content analysis of the transcriptions was performed using MAXQDA 10 [VERBI Software, Marburg, Germany]. The researcher read and re-read the data to familiarize themselves with the collected information and capture relevant issues. Open coding was used to ensure that no critical issues related to the guiding framework were overlooked. The researcher used the main issues derived from the framework and identified important supporting content by coding the data. This information was then used to establish the main themes.

**Validity and Reliability**

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, researchers practiced peer debriefing. This involved engaging more than one peer or qualified expert to objectively relate the obtained themes to the predetermined ones and assess the extent of agreement or divergence. A qualified, impartial colleague reviewed and assessed all coded segments, as well as the methodology used to derive the final themes.

**Findings and Discussions**

**A: Fish Vending Business Threats Among the Women Fish Vendors**

Based on the data collected and analysed, it was noted one of the threats facing the women’s fish vendors was a stigma that emanated from patriarchy. This is because it is believed that culturally, fishing activities were typically male-dominated activity and therefore women involved in fish vending were looked at with a suspicious eye. Moreover, women found themselves in difficult work environments because the majority of the fish sellers were men who sometimes exploited women in various ways such as harassment from various parties, and denial of public space and transportation, (Aswath & Kalpana, 2018).

Another threat experienced by the women vendors was a scarcity of fish which was mainly caused by seasonality reasons as well as men and other powerful traders controlling the availability of fish in the market. Male and big business people bought fish in large quantities and kept on rationing it as it pleased them. In this case, they controlled the market, and women vendors who mainly possessed little capital experienced fish scarcity. Previous studies have also contended that women vendors experienced fish scarcity
due to seasonality factors, centralization of landing centres, unhealthy competition from newly entered fish merchants, and the new entrance of fish vending males with mopeds in domestic markets (FAO, 2022).

Women also experienced an additional threat of higher fish prices that had mainly emanated from fish scarcity. Indeed, it was further observed from the data that during fish scarcity prices raise more than double which make it difficult for the customer to afford. This threat hindered women from buying reasonable amounts of fish for sale due to their relatively small business capital. Most of the fish vendors have inadequate funds for business as well as a record small amount of profit a situation that further downgrades their businesses. These findings, corroborate well with some previous studies in Tanzania which mentioned inadequate Business capital as one of the acute business difficulties experienced by street vendors and notably female fish vendors face in Dar es Salaam (Munishi & Casmir 2019).

Furthermore, women experienced a threat of inadequate business capital to expand their business. One of the respondents provided a detailed explanation, stating that their inability to secure loans is not solely determined by their personal network’s influence on finding someone to assure for them, but also by the specific loan amount required by the lender:

“The inability to access loans from financial institutions made our business difficult to undertake, so we establish a business with very small capital acquired through collateral means. The threat remains that, the size of capital you get does not satisfy your initial plans and this in return makes the business hard to undertake, we request the Government and other stakeholders support our efforts so that we can improve our business and family life as well…” (Interview, March 2023).

The various forms of gender-related violence, such as sexual harassment, that the female fish vendors faced were worsened by the lack of social protection and authority support. As a result, women fish vendors tended to forego their business due to constant assault that they faced. It was further revealed that some women vendors were sexually exploited as one of the conditions for these men either to buy fish from the women or sell fish to the women at relatively low prices more especially the time of fish scarcity characterized by higher fish prices. Furthermore, women explained further that they lack quick response and inadequate support from the relevant authority when reporting different cases of sexual abuse in workplaces. Almost similar kind of threats had been observed in India by (Kantor and Kruisjes, 2014). It also corroborates with another study by Aswathi & Kalpana, (2018) which maintains that informal female fish vendors constantly face sexual harassment, and assault and are considered to be among the vulnerable social groups.

“Some men are always disturbing us for the purpose of seeking relationships even if you are not interested, they tend to force and harass us and at the end of the day you find yourself into the trap. They use a weakness we have such as low capital or threats we face like accessing fish, especially during the low catch, so they tend to supplement either capital or fish for us, unfortunately, some of us agree with the situation and establish extra-marital affairs which put us in many risks such as contracting diseases, marriage conflicts, unexpected pregnancies that made us make abortions or bear a child with a man who is not your real husband, but all of this happens as we are breadwinners and there is no hope of success if we disagree with the circumstance”…. (Interview, March 2023)

Moreover, women fish vendors revealed additional threats related to lack of legal status that denied them business license, documents or identification cards in carrying out their business in the urban setting. Lack of this legal status otherwise this person must be registered. Consequently, this subjected women fish vendors to insecure space business from which to conduct their business, as well as inability to access services such as access to credit through microfinance institutions or other support or services. According to some earlier studies, informal women fish vendors frequently operate their businesses without a license, which makes them vulnerable to threats when they approach the appropriate authorities and, more often than not, places them in awkward situations. (Kantor and Kruisjes, 2014).

In the course of conducting their business, female fish vendors were also subjected to various types of crime, such as robbery, burglary, theft, pickpocketing, kidnapping, and abduction. Theft and pick pocketing happened at the market places as well as during the low catch, so they tend to supplement either capital or fish for us, unfortunately, some of us agree with the situation and establish extra-marital affairs which put us in many risks such as contracting diseases, marriage conflicts, unexpected pregnancies that made us make abortions or bear a child with a man who is not your real husband, but all of this happens as we are breadwinners and there is no hope of success if we disagree with the circumstance”…. (Interview, March 2023)

In most cases, female fish vendors must work very early in the morning and returning very late in the evening. Criminals take advantage of these hours due to the darkness and because there are fewer people on the road. One of the vendors states as here under:

“Most of vendors reach ferry market early at 4:00am which made it easier for them to get affordable price. In most cases price is determined by fish supply in the market, therefore, when getting at the market will find retailers selling fish at a higher price. When we buy fish at a higher price the profit margin out of it is very little.” (Interview, March, 2023)

Another respondent adds:

“We are in security dangers especially early in the morning when we rush to ferry market and during the midnight when we close our businesses as many petty thieves and robbers assumes we have enough money, they tend to invade and injure us to take away the money we have sometimes back we do remember that our fellows were invaded early in the morning before reaching the main road and every penny they have was taken by robbers.” … (Interview, March, 2023)

Last, but not least women vendors experienced a challenge of massive evictions and reallocations have been found to be threats faced by women fish vendors of which because of missing some important documents, especially licenses and other business permits.
Women are forced to evict their business areas of which the flow of customers is assured to where they don’t know. Previous studies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania have also evidenced that vendors experience evictions and reallocations that lead to the decline of their business and as a result, slows down personal development (Kirumirah & Munishi, 2022; Munishi & Casmir, 2019).

“We don’t have vendors’ identity cards to conduct our business and especially in the city centre, this threatens our business, and it’s like we have no legal rights to undertake this activity......and for sure we are discouraged when the city militia (Mgambo) invade us and harass us while risking our products. The government has to consider our petty trade since we are breadwinners of our families, we need financial freedom, we don’t want to depend on men for everything, and some of us are ...widows and single parents...our children need to go to school, they need uniforms, school contributions, and food......we need rent and other expenditures, in short, we need recognition and support from the government” ...... (Interview March, 2023)

B: Coping with Fish Vending Threats and The Capacity to Cope

I: Reactive capacity to cope with the fish vending-related threats

Accordingly, women vendors managed to develop a number of reactive capacities for coping with fish vending-related threats as discussed here under. One of the common reactive strategies developed by the women was joining small self-helping groups popularly known as Village Community Banking (VICOBA). According to the vendors, this strategy would help them cope with threats related to business capital inadequacy and sexual exploitation which they experienced. They justified that; adequate business capital would support their business prosperity thus reducing their dependence on men who had been exploiting them sexually. This is a similar case to Munishi (2017) on the reactive capacity of coping with the threat developed by Maasai. One of the women states here under:

“We have decided to overcome the threat of acquiring capital and depending on men to guarantee us business capital through the establishment of small self-help groups popularly known as VICOBA. These groups are really supportive of our business growth because they provide us with soft loans and some business development ideas. This has increased our self-confidence when interacting with men as we no longer depend on them too much. You see, inadequacy business capital partly pushed into sexual exploitation and sexual harassment.” (Interview March, 2023)

Formation of groups as strategy for coping with both business capital inadequacy and sexual exploitation has been previously noted among the urban street vendors in Dar es Salaam and elsewhere in Africa (Munishi, 2019; Aswathy & Kalpana, 2018; Mrindoko, 2022)

Another reactive strategy developed by the women is seeking closely relative security support when they get out early in the morning as observed in Munishi, (2016); & Munishi,(2022). This strategy was developed to cope with the crime threats and helped them be at the ferry in time and get fresh fish at a good price. One of the respondents pointed it this way:

“You see as women fish vendors we must seek security support from our family members i.e. husbands, children, and even neighbours. We request them to escort us to commuter bus stations during morning hours to ensure our safety from petty robbers who are constantly threatening us in our daily endeavours.” (Interview March, 2023)

II: Proactive strategies to cope with the fish vending related threats

Securing business financing from credible and relevant institutions: Firstly, women vendors proactively, planned to secure big loans from more advanced and relevant financial institutions such as Banks and social security organizations. According to the vendors, this long-term plan would eventually save them from inadequate business capital threat.

Business diversification and adopting new kind of business: One of the proactive strategies developed by women against the fish vending related threats was business diversification and adopting new kind of business that would guarantee them more sells and profit. This strategy would help them overcome the threats related to inadequate business capital as well as avoid sexual exploitation and harassment threats that they experienced. One of the respondents explains it:

“To me I think the only reliable way to overcome business capital inadequacy is retirement from the fish vending business and consider doing more paying and decent business. In this case I now need to more efforts in raising capital from various sources as well as working hard in my current business. We also need to consult differ government authorities such as the local government to supporting us in setting up and supporting our future business.” (Interview March, 2023)

Anticipating to engage in different kind of business as a proactive strategy of coping with undesirable and less decent job was also previously captured among the Maasai migrants engaged is security work in Dar es Salaam (Munishi, 2023) as well as the Motorcycle taxi riders in Dar es Salaam who were uncomfortable with their former jobs (Munishi & Kirumirah, 2023)

Business registration and licensing: Another proactive strategy developed by women fish vendors was an attempt to undertake business registration and licensing so as they could be recognized and avoid threats related to lack of legal status of their business in the urban setting. This strategy aimed at overcoming the threat related to urban informal trading in the urban areas. One of the women puts it this way:
“There is nothing good like being recognized as well as being respected in your business. So, we as women fish vendors don’t have a recognition in our business. We considered very local and because of that our customers value our services. So, we need to register and be recognised by the government. In this case we shall work with the government and other authorities to obtain business identity cards, formal places to run our small businesses.” (Interview, March, 2023)

These strategies have also been captured by (Munishi & Kirumirah, 2020), in Dar es Salaam Tanzania who noted that, issues of vendor licensing and permit issuing is among the critical policy issues in the urban settings. It has attracted different actor’s initiatives including the President himself (Munishi, & Kirumirah, 2020).

**Search for and participate in education and capacity building programmes:** Another proactive strategy anticipated by the women was searching for as well as participating in education and capacity budding programmes. Vendors pronounced that, this strategy would help them to either improve their current business or engage in other more paying business. One of the respondents puts it this way:

“We shall consult various training institutions and local governments authorities to organise relevant training on how to expand more on our business and investment. Through this, I am sure we shall be included in various business forums organized by the government in where we shall obtain relevant business knowledge and skills to improve our business even more.” (Interview, March, 2023)

Another respondent adds on the importance of business education:

“Sometimes thinking about the coming old days stresses us, as we don’t have enough education, we don’t have formal employment and we lack enough capital to run big business that can support us to earn a handsome profit for investing in social schemes such as NSSF. We are worried as we have experienced very old fish vendors are still dealing with the business while they are physically and emotionally tired but they don’t have an alternative way to run their lives. It’s now a right time to re think on investing for our future………..” (Interview, 2023).

**Engaging in Business advocacy:** Another proactive strategy developed by the women fish vendors was advocating for conducive business environment and institutions notably policies and regulations that would favour their business. This would go hand in hand in ensuring recognition of their small informal business by the various relevant government authorities, including the local government:

**Recognizing and joining hands to efforts women made in small business is crucial since their growth mean a lot to the government in terms of employment creation, tax payment and strengthens family welfares, therefore it’s important to initiate strategies to register and boost women investments towards realizing their efforts to sustainable livelihood (Granatham & others, 2021)**

A strategy of coping with inadequate business capital has been through business advocacy was earlier captured among the Maasa security guards, street vendors in Dar es Salaam and Morogoro as well as the youth engaged in the motorcycles taxi riding Business in Dar es Salaam conducive This would ensure supportive business environment and institutions notably policies and regulations that would favour their business (Munishi, 2022; Munishi & Kasimir, 2019; Munishi & Kirumirah 2022). Efforts is needed by the government and other stakeholders to ensure the future investment through social security systems is well planned and seriously undertaken.

**C: Factors constraining the vendors capacity to cope with the threats**

One of the constraints to coping capacity was lack of adequate government support. Women lamented that they did not receive adequate financial support from the government. They acknowledge the local government business grants arrangements. However, they said that the amount was too little as well as marred with a number of bureaucratic procedures when it was eventually forthcoming. These findings are well supported by some previous finding that maintain that majority of the women street vendors have not had adequate financial support from the local government are still eager to receive government support through local government grants which hopefully could boost them economically and with low stress (Mrindoko, 2022).

Moreover, it was noted that, local government was either unaware or not doing anything to intervene on the issues related to crime against women street vendors. Local authorities in streets and wards need to ensure enough security to their residents and this will enhance economic growth (Jegadeswari & Kumari, 2019)

Above all lack of knowledge about financial institutions was also noted to be a constraint. It was observed that women fish vendors had inadequate knowledge about financial institutions which limit their access to soft loans that would help to increase the size of their capital (Munishi & Kasimir, 2019).

**Conclusions**

The study aimed to identify and propose strategies for overcoming threats faced by urban-based women involved in the informal fish vending business. The findings revealed various threats experienced by vendors, including stigma, fish scarcity, higher fish prices, inadequate business capital, gender-related violence, lack of legal status, various forms of crime, and evictions/reallocations. The study highlighted both reactive and proactive strategies employed by vendors to cope with these threats. Reactive strategies included
joining self-help groups and seeking support from family, while proactive strategies involved securing financing, diversifying businesses, registering and licensing, participating in education and capacity building programs, and engaging in business advocacy. The study also identified factors that hindered the vendors’ capacity to cope, such as lack of government support and inadequate business skills.

In conclusion, it is recommended that supporting women fish vendors to cope with the threats they face in their fishing business activities should involve addressing the identified constraints. Adequate government support and provision of business skills are crucial for enhancing the vendors’ coping abilities. By addressing these factors, policymakers and support organizations can contribute to empowering women fish vendors and enabling them to more effectively deal with the challenges they encounter in their businesses.

**Recommendations**

Based on the foregoing discussion and conclusion, the following recommendations are made in light of improving the women vendors increase their resilience against the various fish vending threats they experience:

i. Government should work on the issue of ensuring legal status of the of street vendors through issuing of issue identity cards to all informal traders in the urban setting including the female fish vendors

ii. In order to alleviate the threat related to lack of knowledge about financial institutions among the vendors there should be awareness campaign on the importance of financial institutions as well as properly be linked to fish vendors. This would guarantee proper management of their business.

iii. Government should also enact proper policies that support street vending that would also facilitate provision of support to women fish vendors notably reducing bureaucratic procedures that limit women vendors from access to the loan.

iv. On top of that the government should provide enough entrepreneurship education to the vendors through capacity building and training sessions among women vendors. This would guarantee proper management of their business.

v. On stigmatization, there should be awareness campaign to the community to eradicate cultures that treat women as disregarded in the fishing business and appreciate their contribution at family levels.

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