

## DOCUMENT

**Informal fish retailing in rural Egypt**

**Kantor, P., Kruijssen, F. (2014). Opportunities to enhance income and work conditions for women and men. WorldFish, Penang, Malaysia. Project Report: 2014-51**

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**A**quaculture has seen a steady growth in Egypt in the last two decades, and today provides 65 percent of the fish eaten by Egyptians. The aquaculture value chain employs around 100,000 workers, half of whom are youths. Fish from aquaculture is by far the cheapest source of animal protein in the country, and therefore has particular importance to the country's 21 million poor people.

Informal fish vending, particularly in rural Egypt, is the one activity in the fish aquaculture value chain that provides employment to women. However, Egyptian women face several constraints, including norms around domestic work leaving little time to engage in income generation; lack of access to working capital; and cultural norms against women's visibility in public spaces.

Improving Employment and Incomes through the Development of Egypt's Aquaculture Sector (IEIDEAS) is a project funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and implemented in five governorates in the country. It seeks to improve the income and working conditions of women fish vendors. The present study on informal fish retailing in rural Egypt sought to conduct a gender analysis of fish vending in the aquaculture value chain, to identify how gender impacted characteristics of employment in the sector. It located its research in the areas of work of the IEIDEAS project. The study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, and interviewed a sample of 507 women and 241 men.

One significant finding of the study was that women fish retailers came from numerically larger families, and with greater number of children under the age of 15. This seemed to indicate that it was economic pressure that drove women to seek employment in this sector.

The study revealed certain widely-held gender stereotypes: married women should not have control over their own savings; men could not take care of children as well as women could; and that it was not acceptable for a married woman to work outside the home if her husband earned enough for the family.

The strongest endorsement was for the proposition that a woman cannot leave the home without permission of her husband. In the context, clearly, women would find it difficult to come out voluntarily and freely to take up any form of economic activity, which ties with the finding that the women took to employment because of economic pressure.

The study found that 15 percent of the women respondents were able to save some of their income while nearly 80 percent spent some on personal consumption. This finding does hold out the hope that with improved conditions in the sector, women might seek employment as a way to enriching their lives.

The most significant constraint reported by both women and men in the trade was the lack of a secure selling site. In contrast, lack of credit was not identified as a significant constraint by most respondents. This is not surprising given the small size of operation of the rural fish vendors. The situation could change if external development aid allowed women and men to access more capital and assets and move to more profitable avenues of fish trade. ❏



PUBLISHED BY  
the International Collective  
in Support of Fishworkers  
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PRINTED AT  
L.S. Graphic Prints  
Chennai 600 002

Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 500 words. They could deal with issues that are of direct relevance to women and men of fishing communities. They could also focus on recent research or on meetings and workshops that have raised gender issues in fisheries. Also welcome are life stories of women

and men of fishing communities working towards a sustainable fishery or for a recognition of their work within the fishery. Please also include a one-line biographical note on the writer.

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