

## Chapter 26

### Livelihood opportunities for fisherwomen through activity clusters – A case study of clam

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Activity clusters have been long associated with collective action for achieving common goals. This could be employment, income, or for achieving other social-political targets. Under a project funded by the Department of Science & Technology, Government of India, clustering activity was taken up for clam fishers harvesting black clam, *Villoritacyprinoides* at a village in Kerala. Kerala is a state with one of the richest clam resources in India. The main clam species available in Kerala estuaries in the order of abundance are *Villoritacyprinoides*, *Meretrixcasta*, *Paphiamalabarica*, *Katelysiaopima* and *Meretrixmeretrix*.

Clam fishing has been a traditional family oriented activity along the backwaters. The levels of investment are low both for harvesting and processing and both meat and the shell have a market. Though the activity is seasonal and there are periods of good harvest of large sized clams, this activity is carried out almost all through the year. In clam picking, colonies of clam are located in the backwaters and the clam collected, either manually or using a dredge net. Clam meat and shell are the two economically important products of the fishery. The clam meat is mainly consumed locally and a small portion has been utilised as a feed in shrimp farms (Laxmilatha and Appukuttan, 2002). In the whole clam, almost 80% of the weight is the shell and the meat around 10%. It is estimated that around 5000-7000 persons are engaged in clam picking (Appukuttan, 2007) from various water bodies and are engaged in processing and marketing of the shell as well as meat.

The clam fishers who were targeted for this project and their fishery is located at Perumbalam village which comes under Poochakkalpanchayat of the Thycatusherry block of the Cherthalataluk of Alleppey district in South Kerala. The village is an island and the nearest town Arookutty, which is 4.5kms from the island, borders Ernakulam city. The distance to Ernakulam city is around 19 km. The geographical area of 16.32 km<sup>2</sup>, it is around 7kms in length and 2 kms in width. This village has about 250 families that carries out clam picking activity. The activity is a family based activity, with the men engaged in harvesting (though it is not exclusively a male activity as women are also involved in picking), the women processing the harvested clam and undertaking the marketing activity. Their detailed daily routine activity such as clam picking and processing activities timeline is given in Fig. 1) (Gopal et. al., 2011; Gopal et. al., 2014).

Fig. 1: Time analysis of fisher persons involved in the clam picking and processing activity

Market	Timing/ Gender	4.00 to 6.00 am	6.00 to 8.00 am	8.00 to 10.00 am	10.00 am to 12.00 pm	12.00 to 2.00 pm	2.00 to 4.00 pm	4.00 to 6.00 pm	2.00 to 4.00 am	
Morning Market	Men	Clam Picking								
	Women	Clam Processing	Clam Marketing						Clam Processing	
Evening Market	Men	Clam Picking								
	Women			Clam Processing		Clam Marketing				

Both men and women were involved in picking clam though men dominated this activity. The total time spent on harvesting can last upto 10 h. The larger sized clams are boiled while the smaller ones are either sold whole to the shell traders or are relaid. The clam fishers were the primary targets of the cluster development activity. The cluster faces uncertainties with regards to their daily catches. Their inconsistent and low incomes in turn adversely affects living conditions, family health and nutrition, as well as children’s education. The cluster was not supported by any agency/ Institute explicitly. However the fishers have been using the services of the agencies/Institutions in the village for various purposes. ICAR-CIFT through the project supported the development of the cluster as well as had a long term strategy of improving the methods of processing of clam, so as to reduce drudgery and improve incomes of the fisherwomen and families.



Cluster meetings

The methodology of ICAR-CIFT for cluster development is given in Fig. 2.

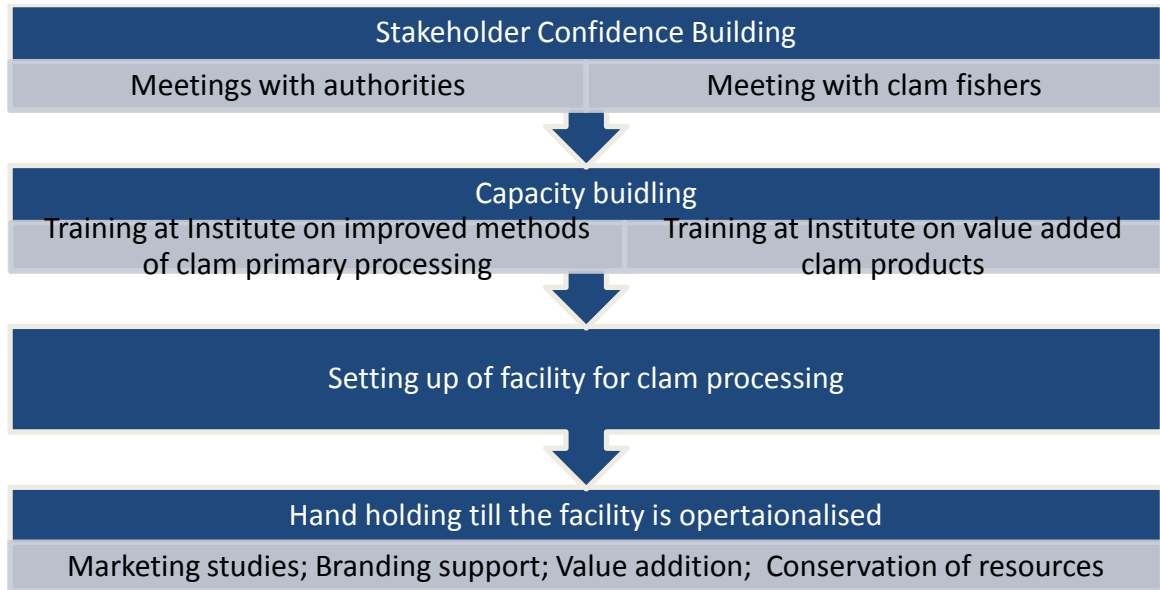
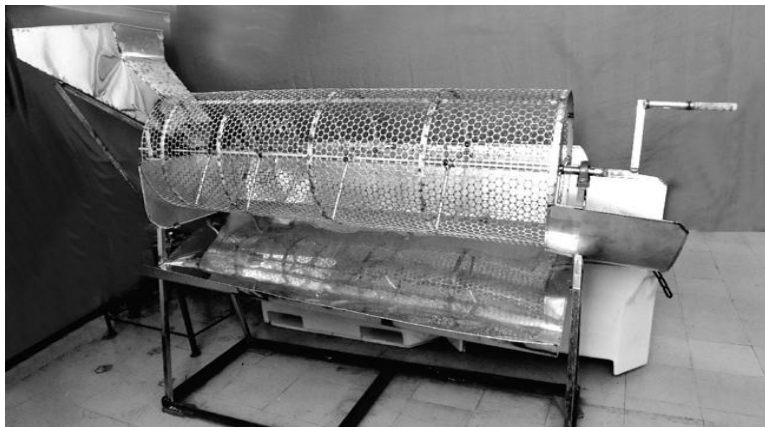


Fig 2: Cluster Development Strategy

The strength of the Institute in value addition helped in strengthening the idea of forming the cluster as the fishers, especially the women, were exposed to the same through targeted capacity building programmes. Simultaneously conservation of the resource by relaying small sized calms that were harvested along with the mature and marketable sizes was encouraged, through relaying activities. The processing facility is being set up for depuration, mechanised boiling and shucking through equipment specifically developed for the purpose (Sreejth et. al., 2018).



Constant interaction with the fishers and reinforcement of the benefits of clustering and collective action are necessary for successful implementation.

## References

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