

NAVIGATING CHALLENGES IN THE NEITHAL SEAFOOD SECTOR: A CASE STUDY OF A RURAL FISHEPRENEUR IN COASTAL TAMIL NADU

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Abstract—Rural entrepreneurship plays a vital role in promoting inclusive economic development, livelihood diversification, and community resilience in developing economies. The fisheries sector is particularly significant in coastal regions of India where fishing-related activities provide employment and income to millions of households. This study explores the entrepreneurial journey of a rural fishepreneur operating in the Neithal seafood sector using a qualitative case study approach. The research focuses on a woman entrepreneur managing a small seafood enterprise named Neithal Seafood. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and field observations and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that entrepreneurial motivation was influenced by personal experience, market demand for hygienic seafood, and a desire to support local fishing communities. However, the enterprise faces challenges such as supply chain instability, lack of cold storage infrastructure, price volatility, and market competition. Despite these constraints, opportunities exist through digital marketing, home delivery services, and value-added seafood products. The study contributes to the literature on rural entrepreneurship by providing empirical insights into fishepreneurship in coastal communities and highlights the importance of institutional support, entrepreneurial training, and financial assistance for rural seafood enterprises.

Keywords: Coastal livelihoods; Fishepreneurship; Rural entrepreneurship; Seafood industry; Women entrepreneurship.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has long been recognized as a fundamental driver of economic development, innovation, and employment generation. In rural contexts, entrepreneurial initiatives are particularly important as they enable communities to diversify their income sources and reduce dependence on traditional livelihoods. Rural entrepreneurship also contributes to local economic development by utilizing local resources, traditional knowledge, and community networks.

The fisheries sector plays a critical role in the socio-economic development of coastal regions. In India, fisheries provide direct and indirect employment to millions of people engaged in harvesting, processing, marketing, and distribution activities. The growing demand for seafood in domestic and international markets has created opportunities for small-scale enterprises involved in seafood processing and retail.

In recent years, the concept of **fishepreneurship** has emerged as a significant approach to strengthening fisheries-based livelihoods. Fishepreneurship refers to entrepreneurial activities within the fisheries value chain, including fish harvesting, processing, packaging, marketing, and value addition.

Women entrepreneurs have increasingly participated in fisheries-related businesses, particularly in seafood processing and retail marketing. These entrepreneurial activities not only contribute to household income but also enhance women's economic empowerment in rural communities.

Despite the potential benefits of fisheries entrepreneurship, rural fishepreneurs face numerous structural and operational challenges, including limited infrastructure, supply chain disruptions, lack of financial support, and limited access to technology. Understanding the lived experiences of rural fishepreneurs is therefore essential for designing policies and support systems that promote sustainable entrepreneurship.

This study examines the entrepreneurial journey of a rural seafood entrepreneur in the **Neithal coastal landscape of Tamil Nadu**, focusing on the challenges, strategies, and opportunities associated with rural fishepreneurship.

Review of Literature

Rural entrepreneurship has been widely studied as an important mechanism for promoting economic development and poverty reduction in developing countries. Small-scale enterprises in rural areas often emerge as adaptive responses to resource constraints and limited employment opportunities.

Studies on fisheries entrepreneurship highlight the role of innovation, market linkages, and value addition in improving income generation among fishing communities. Pandey and De (2015) found that entrepreneurial traits such as innovativeness, leadership, and risk-taking significantly influence the performance of fisheries enterprises.

Similarly, Reshma and Kalluraya (2024) emphasize that fisheries entrepreneurship involves efficient resource utilization, value addition, and market integration to enhance profitability. The development of value-added seafood products such as processed fish, packaged seafood, and ready-to-cook fish products has increased opportunities for small-scale seafood entrepreneurs.

Women's participation in fisheries-related enterprises has also gained attention in recent research. Tanuja et al. (2022) reported that value-added seafood processing activities provide significant income opportunities for rural women while strengthening their socio-economic status.

However, several challenges continue to affect the growth of small-scale fisheries enterprises. According to Béné (2006), small-scale fishers often face limited access to credit, infrastructure, and technology, which reduces their productivity and profitability. Similarly, Allison and Ellis (2001) highlight that fisheries livelihoods are vulnerable to environmental fluctuations and market uncertainties.

Although these studies provide important insights into fisheries economics and entrepreneurship, limited research has examined the **entrepreneurial experiences of individual fishepreneurs through qualitative case studies**. This study therefore contributes to the literature by providing an in-depth examination of rural fishepreneurship in a coastal context.

Objectives

1. To Explore and Understand the Specific Challenges Faced by Rural Fishepreneurs in the Seafood Industry
2. To Examine the Strategies and Practices Used by Successful Rural Fishepreneurs
3. To Overcome Challenges and Achieve Sustainable Business Growth

Theoretical Framework

Schumpeter's Theory of Entrepreneurship

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on **Schumpeter's theory of entrepreneurship**, which emphasizes the role of innovation and creative destruction in economic development. According to Schumpeter (1934), entrepreneurs introduce new combinations of resources, products, or processes that transform existing markets.

In the context of fisheries entrepreneurship, innovation may include:

- Introducing value-added seafood products
- Developing new marketing channels
- Adopting digital platforms for customer engagement
- Creating convenient food solutions such as ready-to-cook seafood

Mrs. Aamina's business reflects Schumpeterian entrepreneurship by introducing **innovative seafood retail practices**, including home delivery and ready-to-cook seafood products.

Kirzner's Entrepreneurial Alertness Theory

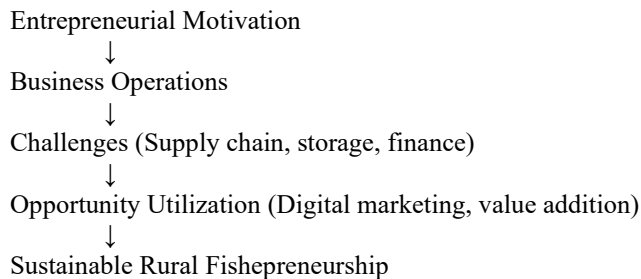
Kirzner (1973) proposed that entrepreneurship is driven by **entrepreneurial alertness**, which refers to the ability of individuals to identify market opportunities that others overlook. Entrepreneurs exploit these opportunities to create profitable ventures.

In this study, the entrepreneur recognized a **market gap for hygienic and convenient seafood products**, demonstrating entrepreneurial alertness in identifying emerging consumer preferences.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework explains the relationship between **entrepreneurial motivation, operational challenges, and growth opportunities** influencing rural fishepreneurship.

Conceptual Model



Key Variables

Entrepreneurial Motivation

- Personal passion
- Market demand
- Community support

Business Challenges

- Supply chain instability
- Storage limitations
- Market competition
- Financial constraints

Growth Opportunities

- Digital marketing
- Home delivery services
- Value-added seafood products

Limitations

This study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the focus on *Neithal Seafood Concern*, representing a single entrepreneur, may limit the generalizability of the findings to other geographical regions and sectors within the seafood industry. Secondly, the use of a qualitative research approach with a relatively small sample size may introduce potential researcher bias and constrain the broader representativeness of the results. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data from rural fishepreneurs may be subject to respondent bias, including recall inaccuracies and social desirability effects.

Despite these limitations, the study offers meaningful insights into the challenges and opportunities encountered by rural fishepreneurs within the Neithal seafood sector, thereby contributing valuable evidence to inform policy formulation and practical interventions aimed at strengthening this emerging domain.

Statement of the problem

The Neithal sea food business, a vital sector for many rural communities, faces numerous challenges that hinder the growth and sustainability of rural fishepreneurship. This study aims to investigate the specific challenges faced by rural fishepreneurs in the Neithal sea food industry and explore potential solutions to support their growth and development.

Need for the study

The Neithal sea food industry plays a vital role in the livelihoods of rural communities, but the challenges faced by rural fishepreneurs in this sector remain underexplored. There is a need for a comprehensive study to understand the specific challenges, opportunities, and sustainability issues affecting rural fishepreneurs in this industry. By examining the experiences and perspectives of rural fishepreneurs, this study can provide valuable insights into the complexities of this sector and inform strategies for improvement. This study is essential for promoting sustainable development, improving livelihoods, and enhancing the overall performance of the fisheries sector. By identifying the key challenges and opportunities, this research can inform policy and practice aimed at supporting rural fishepreneurs, improving their access to resources, and promoting environmentally friendly and socially responsible fisheries practices. The findings of this study can contribute to the development of more effective interventions and strategies to support the growth and sustainability of rural fishepreneurship in the Neithal sea food industry.

Significance of the Study

Understanding Rural Fishepreneurship Provides insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by rural fishepreneurs. Informing Policy and Practice Informs policy and practice aimed at supporting rural fishepreneurs and promoting sustainable fisheries management. Promoting Sustainable Development Contributes to sustainable development in coastal communities by promoting environmentally friendly and socially responsible fisheries practices. Page 4 Empowering Fishepreneurs Empowers rural fishepreneurs to make informed decisions and improve their businesses. Improving Livelihoods Has the potential to improve livelihoods and economic development in rural areas. 1.6 Research gap Filling Knowledge Gap Fills the knowledge gap on rural fishepreneurship in the Neithal sea food industry, providing valuable insights for stakeholders.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a **qualitative case study design** to explore the experiences of a rural fishepreneur in the seafood industry.

Data Collection Methods

Primary data were collected through:

- In-depth interviews
- Participant observation
- Informal discussions with community members

Sampling Technique

A **purposive single-case sampling method** was used to select the entrepreneur managing the enterprise *Neithal Seafood*.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, which involved coding interview responses and identifying recurring patterns and themes.

Case Profile: The Entrepreneur

The case study focuses on **Mrs. Aamina**, a 38-year-old rural entrepreneur operating the seafood enterprise *Neithal Seafood*. The enterprise specializes in providing fresh seafood that is cleaned, packaged, and ready to cook.

The entrepreneur sources seafood directly from local fishermen and delivers it to customers through a home delivery system. This business model enables the entrepreneur to differentiate her products from traditional seafood markets.

Thematic Coding Table

Theme	Codes	Interpretation
Entrepreneurial Motivation	Passion for seafood, family experience	Personal background influences entrepreneurship
Market Opportunity	Demand for hygienic seafood	Emerging consumer preferences
Innovation Strategy	Home delivery, ready-to-cook seafood	Product differentiation
Operational Challenges	Supply fluctuations, storage issues	Structural limitations
Financial Constraints	Limited access to capital	Difficulty expanding business
Growth Opportunities	Digital marketing, value addition	Potential for enterprise expansion

Findings and Discussion

Objective 1: “To Explore and Understand the Specific Challenges Faced by Rural Fishpreneurs in the Seafood Industry”

- **Intense Market Competition:** Rural fishpreneurs must compete with established seafood businesses and larger suppliers in the market.
- **Limited Access to Market Information:** Understanding changing consumer preferences and industry trends can be difficult due to limited resources and exposure.
- **Maintaining Seafood Freshness:** Ensuring consistent product quality and freshness is challenging because seafood is highly perishable.
- **Temperature Control During Processing and Storage:** Improper temperature management can lead to spoilage, contamination, and financial losses.
- **Safety Risks in Processing Activities:** Handling cutting tools and processing equipment can lead to injuries if proper safety measures are not followed.
- **Collecting and Managing Customer Feedback:** Entrepreneurs must actively communicate with customers to understand their needs and improve products.
- **Learning from Business Failures:** Identifying the root causes of operational problems and implementing corrective measures is necessary for improvement.
- **Adapting to Changing Market Conditions:** Rural fishpreneurs need flexibility to respond to fluctuations in demand, supply, and competition.

Objective 2: “To Examine the Strategies and Practices Used by Successful Rural Fishpreneurs”

- **Product Diversification:** Offering a wide range of seafood products such as kingfish, pomfret, anchovy, milk trevally, barracuda, prawns, crab, and squid to meet different customer preferences.
- **Quality Preservation Practices:** Maintaining seafood freshness through proper temperature control using ice bars, freezers, and refrigerated transport systems.
- **Sustainable Packaging Methods:** Using banana leaves in packaging to maintain product freshness while promoting eco-friendly practices.
- **Fish Processing Skills:** Developing skills in cutting and processing seafood to increase product value and reduce waste.
- **Financial and Expense Management:** Carefully managing transportation, fuel, maintenance, and supply costs to maintain profitability.
- **Reliable Supply Sourcing:** Obtaining seafood from personal fishing operations and trusted local fishermen to ensure consistent supply and quality.

- **Word-of-Mouth Marketing:** Promoting products through customer recommendations and personal networks rather than relying on digital advertising.
- **In-house Logistics Management:** Controlling transportation, storage, and delivery processes internally to ensure timely distribution and product freshness.
- **Customer-focused Delivery System:** Prioritizing prompt delivery and high product standards to maintain customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Objective 3: “To Overcome Challenges and Achieve Sustainable Business Growth”

- **Pre-booking for Timely Delivery:** Using advance orders to plan logistics and ensure efficient and punctual delivery of seafood products.
- **Skilled Workforce Requirement:** Employing workers with fish handling and cutting expertise to improve operational efficiency and hygiene standards.
- **Direct Selling Approach:** Operating through a **zero-level distribution channel**, selling directly to customers without intermediaries to reduce costs and increase profit.
- **Operational Innovation:** Introducing improved delivery methods and packaging solutions to enhance efficiency and product quality.
- **Customer Attraction Methods:** Gaining new customers through competitive pricing, high product quality, attractive packaging, and good service.
- **Identifying Growth Opportunities:** Using market research and data analysis to find new expansion and business development opportunities.
- **Efficient Transportation System:** Using vehicles such as cars, bikes, and scooters with freezer facilities to maintain freshness during delivery.
- **Sustainable Business Practices:** Adopting waste management and eco-friendly practices to reduce environmental impact and support long-term sustainability.

Entrepreneurial Motivation

The entrepreneur’s decision to start the seafood business was influenced by personal passion, familiarity with coastal fishing culture, and the desire to achieve economic independence.

Market Opportunities

The increasing demand for hygienic seafood products has created opportunities for small seafood enterprises. Consumers increasingly prefer seafood that is cleaned, packaged, and ready to cook.

Business Innovation

The introduction of home delivery services and convenient seafood packaging represents an innovative approach that enhances customer satisfaction.

Operational Challenges

Despite its success, the enterprise faces challenges such as:

- Seasonal fluctuations in seafood supply
- Limited cold storage infrastructure
- Price volatility in seafood markets
- Competition from traditional vendors

Recommendations

1. Development of community-level cold storage facilities

2. Entrepreneurship training programs for fisheries entrepreneurs
3. Promotion of digital marketing platforms for seafood businesses
4. Improved access to microfinance and credit facilities
5. Strengthening cooperative networks between fishermen and seafood entrepreneurs

Conclusion

This study provides important insights into rural fishpreneurship by examining the experiences of a seafood entrepreneur operating in coastal Tamil Nadu through an in-depth case study approach. The findings highlight the dynamic nature of rural entrepreneurship in the fisheries sector and demonstrate that entrepreneurial motivation, innovation, and market awareness play critical roles in sustaining small-scale seafood enterprises. Rural fisheries enterprises often operate in uncertain and resource-constrained environments; therefore, entrepreneurs must continuously adapt to fluctuating fish supply, market price instability, and competition. Previous studies emphasize that entrepreneurial values such as innovativeness, proactiveness, and resilience are essential for achieving sustainability in fisheries-based enterprises (Muhamad et al., 2024; Yudhanto et al., 2023).

The case study findings further reveal that personal motivation and livelihood security are major drivers of rural entrepreneurship in coastal communities. Entrepreneurs often establish fisheries-related businesses to achieve economic independence, enhance household income, and improve social mobility. Such motivations are common among rural entrepreneurs who transform traditional fishing activities into more structured business ventures (Boari & Yenusi, 2025). In addition, value addition, product diversification, and improved marketing strategies can significantly strengthen the competitiveness of small seafood enterprises. Research on rural fish processing enterprises has shown that value-added seafood products and improved handling practices can increase profitability and reduce post-harvest losses (Tanuja et al., 2022).

Despite these opportunities, rural fishpreneurs face several structural and institutional challenges. Limited access to formal credit, inadequate cold storage infrastructure, dependence on intermediaries, and insufficient marketing knowledge often restrict the growth potential of fisheries-based enterprises. Studies in fisheries entrepreneurship indicate that insufficient government support and regulatory barriers can also limit the sustainability of small-scale fisheries businesses (Mushkam et al., 2024; Muhamad et al., 2024). Furthermore, rural entrepreneurs frequently lack exposure to formal business training and digital marketing tools, which can hinder their ability to expand their businesses beyond local markets.

However, the study also identifies emerging opportunities that can support the growth of rural fishpreneurship. The integration of digital technologies such as social media marketing, mobile-based ordering systems, and online seafood retail platforms can help rural entrepreneurs access wider consumer markets and improve business efficiency. Technological innovations and digital systems are increasingly recognized as transformative tools that can enhance the livelihoods and sustainability of small-scale fisheries communities (Enayati et al., 2024). Additionally, entrepreneurship development initiatives in coastal communities have been shown to promote economic empowerment, particularly among women entrepreneurs involved in fisheries and seafood processing sectors (Surni et al., 2024; Yudhanto et al., 2023).

Institutional support mechanisms are therefore essential for strengthening rural fishpreneurship. Government agencies, fisheries departments, and rural development organizations can facilitate entrepreneurial growth by providing skill development programs, financial assistance, and technical training in seafood processing and marketing. Furthermore, entrepreneurship education programs and extension services can improve knowledge transfer and enhance the capacity of rural entrepreneurs to manage fisheries-based enterprises effectively (Tui et al., 2024).

In conclusion, rural fishpreneurship has significant potential to contribute to rural economic development, employment generation, and sustainable fisheries management. By addressing structural constraints and strengthening entrepreneurial capacity through policy interventions, training initiatives, and financial support, policymakers can create an enabling environment for fisheries-based enterprises to thrive. Future research may further explore comparative case studies across coastal regions to better understand the broader socio-economic dynamics of fisheries entrepreneurship and its role in sustainable rural development.

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