

Unveiling and addressing gender inequality in dried fish sector: A Bangladesh perspective



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- **Introducing the sector**
- **Involvement of the women**
- **Who does what**
- **Overall scenario**
- **The case studies**
 - Kuliarchar**
 - Nazirar Tek**
 - Lalpur**
- **The way-out**
- **Take home messages**



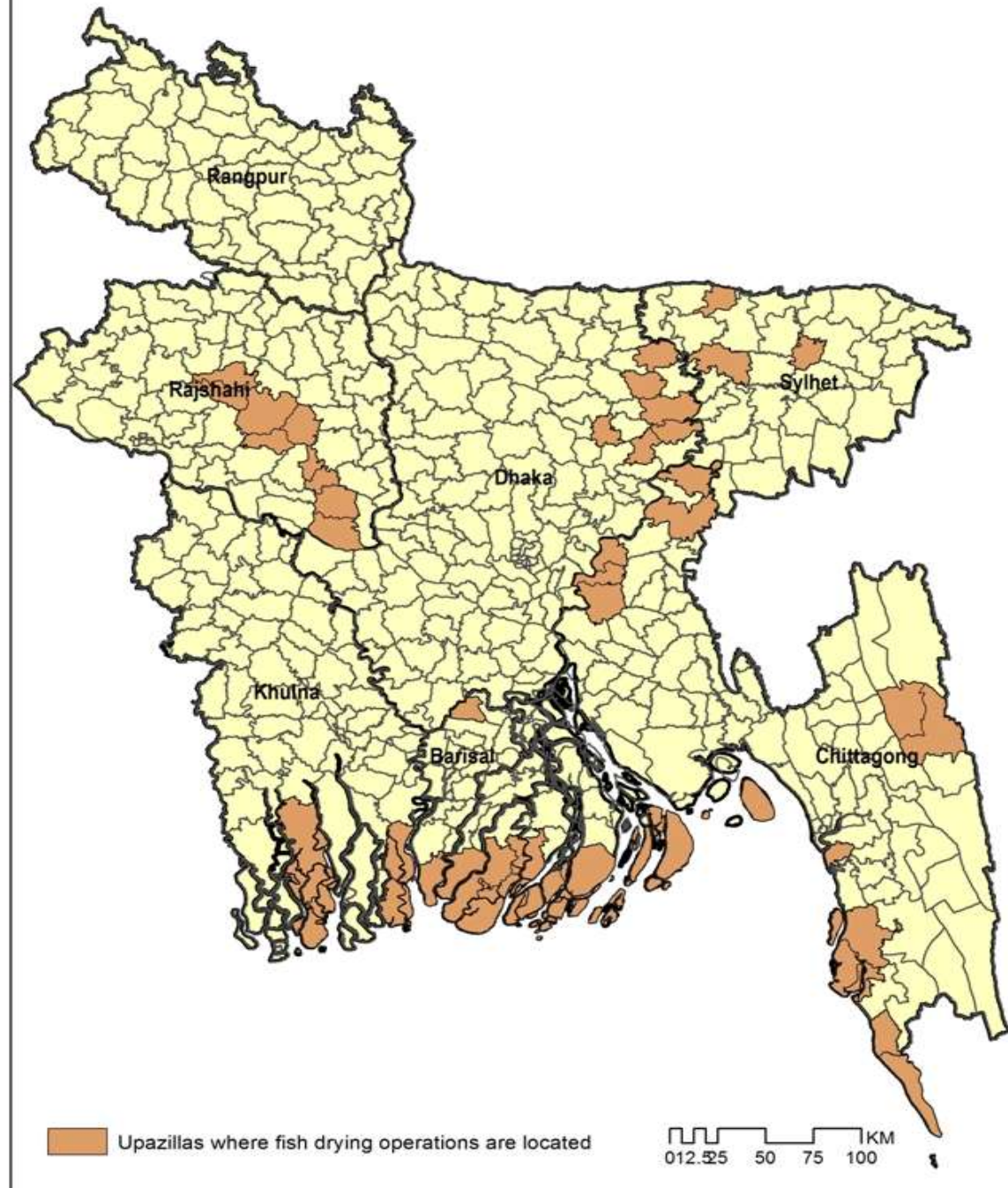
- **Dried (shutki) and fermented (chapa, shidol) fish are among most frequently consumed types of fish in many parts of Bangladesh**
- **Dried fish products are particularly important for poor consumers because, these are relatively cheaper and unlike large fresh fish, they can be purchased in very small quantities (20-50 g), with a low cost per individual portion**
- **Despite the importance of dried fish as a source of food in Bangladesh, due to lack of proper visualization, relatively little is known about the way it's produced and life and livelihood of thousands of women, men and children working in dried fish value chain**



- **The dry fish sector has made a strong position in the economy of Bangladesh.**
- **It is estimated that half of the total marine catch and substantial freshwater catch are dried.**
- **Fish drying, like other fisheries sectors, is not immune to gender disparity, and women often tend to experience the burden of inequality as undervalued and underrepresented actors.**
- **We conducted interviews and FGDs with yard owners, labours, fishers, and traders in fish drying facilities across Bangladesh.**
- **We analyzed the importance and degree of participation of women in fish drying and trading and decision-making process.**



Map of Bangladesh showing sub-districts where different fish drying and fermenting activities are located



Zone	Area	Activities	Women involvement
Greater Mymensingh	Mohonganj	Drying & Fermenting	Only in processing
	Kuliarchar	Drying & Fermenting	Wider involvement in processing and other aspects
Chittagong Cox's Bazar	Cox's Bazar	Drying & trading	In processing
	Moheshkhali	Drying	In processing
	Teknaf	Drying	In processing
	Kutubdia	Drying	In processing
	Asodgonj	Trading	Almost no involvement...
Brahmanbaria	Lalpur	Drying & Fermenting	In processing
Dhaka	Karwan Bazar	Trading	No involvement
	Mohammadpur Bazar	Trading	No involvement
Greater Sylhet	Sunamgonj	Drying	In processing
	Massimpur	Trading	Almost no involvement...
North Bengal	Chalan Beel	Drying	In processing
	Syedpur	Trading	No involvement
Khulna-Barisal	Patuakhali-Barguna	Drying	Little in processing
	Dublar Char	Drying & Trading	Women are prohibited

- Fish drying work was highly gendered, and performed under varied conditions.
- The highly uneven gender distribution of actors indicates that fish drying work is by far the largest 'niche' in which women are able to engage directly as economic actors.
- There is a strong gender division of labour, men perform tasks like fishing, carrying fish to the yard, applying pesticides to prevent fly infestation, weighing and bagging dried product and loading it onto trucks.
- Women are responsible primarily for sorting fresh fish by species, tying pairs of churri and loitya together so that they can be hung up, and turning and further sorting of mixed fish species during the drying process.



Who does what

Fishing	♂
Purchasing fish	♂
Unloading Boat, loading cart	♂
Bringing cart-load fish to yard	♂
Sorting	♀
Pre drying processing	♀
Salting	♂ ♀
Washing	♂ ♀
Tying pairs of churri and loitya	♀
Spreading on the mat, floor	♀
Hanging from elevated stages	♂
Turning upside down	♀
Further sorting semi-dried/dried fish	♀
Covering/uncovering at dawn/dusk	♂ ♀
Weighing and bagging dried product	♂

Who does what

Loading the trucks	♂
Cleaning the utensils & drying yard	♀
Maintaining account	♂
Going to market with product	♂
Cooking in the yard	♀
Preparing oil for conditioning	♀
Conditioning	♂
Filling earthen pot	♂
Trading – wholesale, middlemen	♂
Online trade	♀
Retailing, street vending	♂ ♀
Purchasing from retail market	♂ ♀
Pre-cooking processing, cooking	♀
Consuming	♀ ♂
Mixing chemical/s	♂

the Actors



the Actors





the **3** traders

- **In dried fish sector, the environments, options, constraints and benefits are gender-biased - pro-men.**
- **A combination of factors - limited access to and control over resources, coercing gender norms and taboos, little or no decision making power, and time and labor burdens of unpaid and ill-paid work is key to disadvantage women.**
- **These factors are shaped by a number of cross-cutting issues such as societal, pecuniary, ethnicity/caste affiliation, training and education.**
- **This results women having fewer opportunities and receiving smaller returns from processing than men - lower income for the same/similar job and being socioeconomically vulnerable and left in positions of poverty.**
- **Women who belong to marginalized groups such as refugees bear more severe brunt of these inequities.**

Kuliar char

The facility is located in the Das Para by the Kali River. About 60 dangi (fish drying unit) with average size of 7 dec, all on the elevated bamboo stages, 10 feet above the ground, involved in both drying and fermenting.

Large quantity of Giant snakehead, Gojar (Channa marulias) along with baim, boal are dried here, in addition to the domestic markets, also exported to India (West Bengal through Benapole and Tripura through Agartola)

Unlike other places, Daspara people perceive this as a family business and Husbands, wives and children actively participate in all aspects of the processing and trading. The children, whenever they have time, come to the dangi to assist their parents

Generally two males and one female workers in each dangi as permanent labour. There are a total of 600 women day workers, they get to keep puti guts to make oil and the stomachs.

All the women (and men) involved in fish drying are Hindus, with the exception of a few Muslim dangi owners.

For drying activities, women are paid Tk 150-200/day. Men are paid Tk 3000-400/day on average.

The women work from 7-8 am to 5-6 pm and are given a 1.5 hour break for lunch, do not receive any food from their employer.

Many women work here are unmarried and as they said, they will be able to continue doing this work after they are married if they stay in the area.



Kuliar char



Nazirar Tek

- **One of the largest fish drying facilities in the country, Nazirartek covers an area of 682 acres.**
- **There are nearly 2000 kholas here and about 5% produce fish meal. Nearly all khola owners are from Kutubdia. Each khola has 2-3 permanent workers (all men).**
- **Several thousands day workers, mostly women work in the khola. Significant number of children (mainly girl) also work here.**
- **More than half the women workers involved in fish drying at Nazirartek are Rohingya. They appear to experience slightly higher levels of deprivation and most of them felt their position to be precarious.**
- **Rohingya women and girls without the protection of a husband or male family member are particularly at risk of violence and exploitation, especially from male khola managers with the power to grant or withhold work.**

Wage discrepancy

- **Men work with a prefixed, monthly/daily wage (permanent or semi-permanent worker)**
- **Women's pay are determined on day to day basis (part-timer) based on volume of fish need to be processed (and the time) in a day and is fixed as the yard-owner wishes.**
- **Men are always paid by cash (with regular quality dried product) but women are paid with cash and kind (low quality fresh and dried fish and the fish excreta for extracting oil to be used in fish fermentation).**
- **For same/similar work, men receive 1.5-2 times higher wages than women, although women often work longer hours than men.**
- **The decision making power particularly the pricing and investment decisions is concentrated among male members of the family.**
- **The status of the Rohingya refugee women is highly vulnerable and yard owners force them to work at any available opportunity, out of an urgent economic compulsion.**

Lalpur, Brahmanbaria

Wages categories of Labour for fermented fish (Chapa shutki) production - 2021

Manpower	Sex	Wages (Tk.)
Dressing, cutting and gutting	Female	150 per day (depends) (or fish guts)
Grading	Female	150 per day (depends)
Washing	Male	300-400 per day
Conditioning of the Motka	Male	30 per motka
Filling the Motka	Male	100 per motka



- **Almost all drying yards lack the drinking water and toilet facilities. Now a few yards use underground water for washing and cleaning but there is hardly any toilets. This affects women workers more than the men.**
- **Women workers often suffer from migraine/headaches as they work in the hot sun for long working hours. Diarrhea, jaundice, backache and rheumatism are also very common as is sun burn, leading to very dark skin which is considered undesirable.**
- **Workers drink very little water while working in the strong sun. Washing hand and faces with clean water before and after working in the khola is not a common practice.**
- **As most women operate on a no-work-no-pay basis, they lose working days and income when they are sick, and are forced to borrow money from neighbours/NGOs in order to attempt to treat themselves.**
- **Women face other gender inequalities in areas such as access to skill development and other training access provided by the GOs and NGOs**

Pre-cooking processing and cooking

- Most of the dried/fermented fishes are cooked in small portion with vegetables and spices and bharta (paste), bhuna, fry are produced
- Very pungent but taste is intense and kind of a delicacy in many parts of the country
- People in Chittagong-Cox's Bazar prefer dry fish to fresh fish
- But pre-cooking processing and cooking and of dried fish is all women's' job, and hardly any man do this job.



- **The challenges are momentous for more than reasons of social justice.**
- **Growing evidence signals that gender equality play a key role in dried fish sectors' important contributions to achieving the national goals of poverty reduction and food and nutrition security.**
- **To begin with, we suggest a regulatory guideline provided by the government and agreed by all the parties detailing -**
 - The minimum and identical wages for women and men working in drying yards.**
 - Provision of a healthy and hygienic set-up with drinking water and toilet facilities**
 - Primary and basic medical facilities in the yard**
 - Course of action to deal with no work- no pay during the drying season**
 - Alternative livelihood options for the women during off-season**
 - Clear and doable instruction in employing adolescent girls**
 - Provision of education – mobile or night schools for the women and children**
 - Strict measures to all sort of violence against women in the drying yard**

- **Gender equality in the fish drying can bring many potential benefits including household incomes, and positive livelihood and nutritional outcomes.**
- **Interdisciplinary research is needed to better understand and assist with policy and practice concerning gender in dried fish sector of Bangladesh.**
- **Future works must focus on gender equity, to ensure that research and development interventions are inclusive, equitable in process and outcome, and meet the specific needs women.**
- **The innovative research-based policies and development interventions using gender transformative approaches (GTA) can close the gender gap in dried fish sector of the country, without increasing women's time and labor burdens.**



Thank you very much



Chalan Beel – one of the inland fish drying hubs

Most of the women working in fish drying in Chalan Beel, think it has got little social status. Poverty and the lack of any alternative sources of income compelled them to work in drying yard. As there is no alternative, many women have been working here from dawn to dusk to meet the expense of the education of their children and the family need, if there had been any other options of livelihood, they would not have come here.

Many mothers often bring their school-going daughters to the drying yard, but the girls always try to hide the fact with their classmates or even with relatives as they do not want to be looked down on. Women who have got a daughter reaching marriageable age, or those who send their children to school, do not want to take up this profession considering the loss of their social status and difficulty with the girl's marriage.

Nevertheless, the women found working in the dry fish *kholas* allowed them a little liberty. At least they do not have to go through the name-calling of *kamer beti* or *kajer bua* (domestic help) by the neighbors.