

# Gender, social economy, and the making of dried fish in Asia

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## *Framing Gender, social economy, and the making of dried fish in Asia*

Presentation and panel:

Report on in-progress major outcome of the **Dried Fish Matters** project

Two outputs and this panel's structure:

1. Synthesis paper
2. Edited volume



# Framing Gender, social economy, and the making of dried fish in Asia

Approach and ideas:

- Social economy and values
  - 'normative' and 'economic'
- Gender and the making of dried fish
  - Feminist political economy
  - Feminist commodity chain analysis
  - Social wellbeing



Methodology: collaborative knowledge construction

WG1 Gender and social economies: fullest expression of this

Long-term, evolving, iterative process of collaborative learning

# Methodology: gender and dried fish knowledge synthesis

Conceptual framework & themes – Synthesis paper outline 1.3

## Steps

- Collate Materials
  - 20 reports
  - 14 students' theses
  - DFM e-book
  - 15 publications
- Build Zotero library
- Coding
- Dossiers for team members
- Ongoing iterations

Create codes & subcodes

Review and coding

Clarify codes

Reports: Dossier

e.g.

Gender and dried fish social economies edited volume

These panels are the foundation!

Findings: Production and reproduction relations in processing

Data coverage:



Coverage of theme across codes: **extensive**



## How contextually specific are gendered economic practices?

### Similarities (code co-occurrence analysis)

- Women's central role in processing across all sites (household and wage-labour)
- Processing is feminized and reproductive roles are supported by their processing income
- Precarity, poor working conditions, working due to necessity

### Variance

- Value vs resentment – some express pride in their work, others hope their children do not have to do it

### **Women's Agency**

- Varies within and between countries, social identity (widow, caste, religion, migrant, family), role (wage-labour, household, business owner)

### **How do normative and economic approaches to value help us explain variations in women's agency?**

- Stigmatized work (Bangladesh)
- Low socio-economic status (Cambodia)
- Cultural restrictions (Sri Lanka, Myanmar)
- Flexible Schedules (Sri Lanka, Cambodia)
- Co-operatives (India)
- Undervalued wage labour (Cambodia, Bangladesh, India)
- Entrepreneurial opportunities (Sri Lanka, Cambodia, India)
- Flexible payments (Sri Lanka)



## Findings: Production and reproduction relations in processing

Quotes from Production (341) and Household structures & relationships (135)

Example Code: Agency

"Marketing as well as processing of fish are seen as women's roles. I also noticed that women from the fishing communities possess entrepreneurial prowess and the skills necessary to thrive in the competitive marketplace". p 87 in Gujarat, India – Anas Khan 2024

Example Code: Gendered benefits and costs of value chain production

"For the processors participating in the inland value chain, the earnings provide a source of family income or supplementary income. Participants, both women and men, mentioned that the earnings from fish drying and related activities contribute towards their day-to-day living expenses and children's education related expenses". p 111 in Sri Lanka - Madu Galappaththi 2022

A woven bamboo basket is shown from a top-down perspective. Inside the basket, there are several large, vibrant green leaves, likely from a tree used for drying fish. A pile of small, dried fish is scattered across the leaves. The fish are a golden-brown color, indicating they have been dried. The basket is made of light-colored bamboo strips, and some blue string is visible, possibly used for tying the basket. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

## Findings: trade and exchange relations

Geographical coverage of data overall: extensive for all countries except Bangladesh but:

Degree of women's engagement: substantial variation from highest in Cambodia to lowest in Bangladesh

Agency: data are less extensive than for processing

- But evidence for collective institutional supports for or constraints on agency
- Intersectional evidence for individual agency



## Findings: trade and exchange relations

In all three agro-ecological zones around the Tonle Sap and the Mekong in Cambodia, fishing is a man's job while processing and trading are considered primarily women's domains. This division of labour is justified by assertions that men feel tired following fishing trips, whereas "women are better at talking and bargaining with customers" and are familiar with prices... This gendered division of labour results from the socialization of girls and boys from a young age: boys are ashamed to engage in fish trading because it is considered a woman's job; sons usually help their fathers, although they are not obligated to do so; and mothers teach their daughters how to process fish. [9:3 p.22- 23 in Lokuge 2021.pdf; Cambodia]

We spotted two female retailers in Karwanbazaar and one of them said that she faces difficulties while working here. If she doesn't raise her voice and talk loudly, no one listens to her. Male sellers around use abusive words for her. There is no less suffering and adversities while working here as a female vendor. She regrets that she doesn't get the scope to use her capital in the business because male businessmen will not let her exist. [Scoping Report\_Bangladesh\_2nd Draft ]

# Findings: consumption

Data Coverage:



Coverage of themes across codes: comparatively sparse



W Khaing

## Gender and Dried Fish Consumption Among Myanmar Migrants (Nang Lun Kham Synt 2024)

- Dried fish is Myanmar traditional food
- 0.6 Kg/week for both genders
- No significant gender differences
- 96% consumption rate maintained from Myanmar to Thailand
- Subtle differences in context
  - Female migrants cook traditional dried fish dishes more frequently
  - Males prefer simpler preparation methods
- Most popular Dried Fish Products
  - Fish paste (Nga-Pi) – 77% consumption
  - Dried shrimp – 80% across all income levels
  - Traditional varieties: dried snakehead (expensive, availability in Thailand is low), dried anchovy, fermented fish
- Supply sources
  - Local markets near residences
  - Burmese specialty grocery stores
  - Homemade products from community entrepreneurs



## Findings: governance

Data coverage: full geographic diversity but variable depth of analysis

### Agency:

- Women's agency is constrained normatively and economically across all research sites
- Nonetheless, the research also demonstrates how women have used a variety of strategies to assert their interests; with varying success

# Conclusions



Abundance of evidence generated in short period demonstrates the vibrance of the collaborative approach

The data show:

- Large scale contrasts between countries in gendered work in dried fish value chains
- Pervasive but varied structural constraints on women's economic engagement
- Organizing and bravery by women to assert their interests, with mixed success

This presentation has just scratched the surface:

- Papers in this panel will take a much deeper dive into these and other related themes, including:
  - Implications of social economy analysis for livelihoods and wellbeing
  - Drivers and consequences of change