



## **“Patriarchal Bargaining”- Exploring women’s Agency**

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**The research is part of the larger DFM project**

# The Field

Conducted my research in two sites from Teknaf Upazila, Cox's Bazar District, Chittagong Division, Bangladesh.

- South Jaliapara
- Dorgachora





## Argument

- Female laborers' patriarchal bargaining strategies are visible in their everyday engagements and in response to the patriarchal constraints they face within the dried fish value chains in Teknaf.
- They continually bargain with, resist, and sometimes outwit the patriarchal constraints
- They produce, modify, and engage with the existing social structure while bargaining with the patriarchy
- Their bargaining and negotiation with the patriarchal Teknaf society is to achieve subjective, objective, and relational wellbeing.

## Profile of the women

### 1. Single woman/head of the household

- Poor, without husband, abandoned, widow, divorced, husband is in jail, husband is unable to work/paralyzed
- No man to earn in family
- Decisionmaker of the family

### 2. The wives of the owner

- Husband's power empowers them
- Command the laborers, assign their jobs
- Respected by the male and female laborers
- In charge of the khola when her husband is absent
- Her position protects from harassments and patriarchal constraints



# Women labourers' engagements and patriarchal constraints within the Social Economy of Dried Fish

## Engagements

- Preparing and drying fish
- Indigenous knowledge
- Fermenting Fish
- Packaging fish
- Recruitment and training

## Patriarchal Constraints in the dried fish value chains

- Financial exploitation
- Sexual harassment
- Age based constraints
- Clothing
- Societal perceptions
- Negative perceptions about own work
- Exclusion from policy

# Elements of patriarchal bargaining strategies

Patriarchal negotiation strategies are different for female laborers, context based, different at home and workplace

## Women's advantages

### 1. Skill and knowledge

- Gathered this knowledge from years of experience
- Dry and ferment fish exactly to the market demand
- Weather forecasters
- Trainer of both new recruited male and female laborers
- Minimize losses during less productive training period
- Owners depend on their opinion on drying fish
- Business during monsoon season depends on the permanent female laborers



Female laborers are flipping ribbon fish sides to dry properly in South Jaliapara.



## 2. The scarcity of female laborers

- Women stays at home in religiously conservative Teknaf
- Laborer scarcity in both Dorgachora and South Jaliapara
- Only a few women work in the processing sites
- Stigmatization of women's work prevent men to perform those

## 3. Age

- Female laborers are as old or older than khola owners
- Prevents sexual harassment, and empowers to argue with other constraints
- Help them to argue for benefits and needs

# Reactive adaptation

## 1. Clothing

- Always wear burqa and head covering while coming out of house
- Always use head covering in the khola
- Adopt patriarchal ideologies to argue with another one, symbolic bargaining strategy (Kandyoti 1988)

## 2. Places of residence

- To keep jobs, need house near the processing sites, not commuting from another village
- Living away from home village gives freedom from control by villagers, both men and women

## 3. Habits

- Established few “manly” habits, smoking (few women), having tea, betel leaf, drinking soft drinks
- They get a short break like male co-workers

## 4. Savings as belongings

- Property is inherited and controlled by the male family members
- They buy gold jewelry, cows, hens, goats for them

## 5. Everyday forms of resistance

- Foul mouthed and rude
- Swear while communicating which protect from harasser
- Keep their extended families together





## Proactive adaptations

### 1. Networking capabilities

- Maintain regular connections with all the processing site owners, male or female laborers, landowners, and with the local people
- Seek help, Preserve 'dignity'
- Connection with male co-workers create a comfortable work environment
- Long duration (15-40 years) of their engagement helped to create more stable network
- Gathered trust from the khola owners
- Get employment in other processing sites for continuous earning
- Updated about business information strengthens their value

### 2. Women's informal association

- They have connection and unofficial association with all the female laborers
- Helps to argue financial and other benefits
- Enhance their social wellbeing by strengthening bargaining capabilities



## Women's perspectives on their contributions to dried fish production

- Women's contribution are irreplaceable, laughed hearing the question
- Helping the owners,
- Saving their workloads,
- Treat as own work
- Processing site owner Shishir (30) said, "I can complete all the khola activities with female laborers but not with the male laborers. They refuse to perform activities done by the female laborers."



## Conclusion

Their bargaining strategies which transforms into agencies for other women in the society to come out and engage with the value chains and continue their bargaining with the patriarchy for their existence.

Thank you