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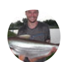
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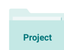
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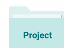
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10. Labour, Identity and Wellbeing in Bangladesh's Dried Fish Value Chains

Ben Belton[1, 2], Mostafa A. R. Hossain[3] and Shakuntala H. Thilsted[2]

Abstract: Dried fish products play an important role in the diets of fish consumers and in the livelihoods of actors in fisheries value chains throughout Africa and Asia. In Bangladesh, a large proportion of marine and freshwater fish landings are processed by drying. The scale and significance of dried fish production, trade and consumption is rarely acknowledged and poorly understood, however, in part because of a tendency for fisheries research to focus on fishers, thereby overlooking actors and processes in mid- and downstream value chain segments. Adopting social wellbeing as an analytical framework, this chapter explores the material conditions faced by labourers engaged in drying fish in Bangladesh, and the ways in which their subjective experiences and objective circumstances are meditated by and constituted through a range of social relations. Case studies are presented from three field sites, where laborers with very different social origins are employed in fish drying under a diverse mix of relations of production, resulting in widely variable but frequently negative social wellbeing outcomes for the women and men involved. The case studies reveal how institutions and identities that constitute important components of social wellbeing for fishers may also be implicated in the exploitation of subordinate groups of labour.

Key words: Social wellbeing, Labour, Small-scale fisheries, Dried fish, Bangladesh

Citation: Belton, B., Hossain, M.A.R., Thilsted, S.H. 2018. Labour, Identity and Wellbeing in Bangladesh's Dried Fish Value Chains. In: Johnson, D., Acott, T.G, Stacey, N., Urquhart, J., (Eds.). Social Wellbeing and the Values of Small-Scale Fisheries. New York: Springer

10.1 Introduction

The edited volume of which this chapter is part makes the case for small-scale fisheries as repositories of multiple values. These include obvious material contributions (e.g. GDP, food, employment), as well as less easily quantifiable social-relational and cultural dimensions, arising from the meanings and social connections that small-scale fisheries provide to the actors who engage in them (p x). Social wellbeing is presented as a framework for investigating and conveying these qualitative values, in order to support a "positive re-evaluation" of small-scale fisheries (p x). Attention is directed toward "community [which] is affirmed by notions of fairness, share systems, kinship connections, locally adapted legal systems, shared attachment to place and profession, and subjectivities which draw these elements together" (p x). This approach places small-scale fishers, and the depth of attachment that many feel towards their profession, front and centre when, "valuing the contributions of productive activity in affirming social relationships and identity" (p x).

This chapter also adopts social wellbeing as an "integrative" theoretical lens (Camfield et al. 2009) through which to analyze the material realities faced by labourers engaged in drying fish in small-scale fisheries in Bangladesh, and the ways in which their subjective experiences and objective circumstances are meditated by and constituted through a variety of social relations. A primary focus on workers engaged in the processing of dried fish, rather than on fishers themselves, generates empirical findings which problematize some of the assumptions outlined above. Although the introduction to this volume acknowledges the need to be wary of romanticizing small-scale fisheries and indicates that their existence has the potential to perpetuate social or economic inequalities, analysis in the present chapter goes further. Here we argue that wellbeing as experienced by fishers may, in fact, sometimes be gained at the expense of other less visible actors. These originate both from within and outside fishing communities, and are exposed to various forms of exploitation as a result of interlinked deprivations (e.g. subordinate positions in relations of gender and ethnicity, and deficits in capabilities, economic resources and social capital). As the chapter shows, everyday discourses of fisher identity and notions of community can play an important role in legitimating and naturalizing this exploitation.

The remainder of the chapter is divided into four parts. The first provides a brief rationale for a focus on dried fish by highlighting the material importance of its consumption and production in Bangladesh. The second describes the concepts and research methods employed. The body of the chapter is comprised of three case studies focusing on the wellbeing of workers employed in fish drying at three locations under sharply contrasting sets of labour relations. The concluding section provides a comparative synthesis of results, and reflection on the application of the concept of wellbeing in small-scale fisheries research.

10.2 Background: Why Dried Fish?

Before elaborating upon research methods and results, it is necessary to explain why this chapter adopts the production of dried fish as its focus. Interest in dried fish initially arose from analysis of food consumption data derived from household surveys. The authors' analysis of a recent nationally representative survey of rural households conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) revealed that, after adjusting for wet weight, dried fish accounted for

the fourth largest share of fish consumed in Bangladesh (Figure 10.1)[1]. In addition, at 0.08, the weighted Gini coefficient of consumption of dried fish was lower than that of any other type of fish, indicating a higher degree of accessibility to consumers in all income groups than any other fish product[2]. Belton et al. (2014) also found that that dried fish were eaten more frequently than any other type of fish in some regions of Bangladesh, and that the contribution of dried products to total fish consumption was disproportionately important for low-income consumers.

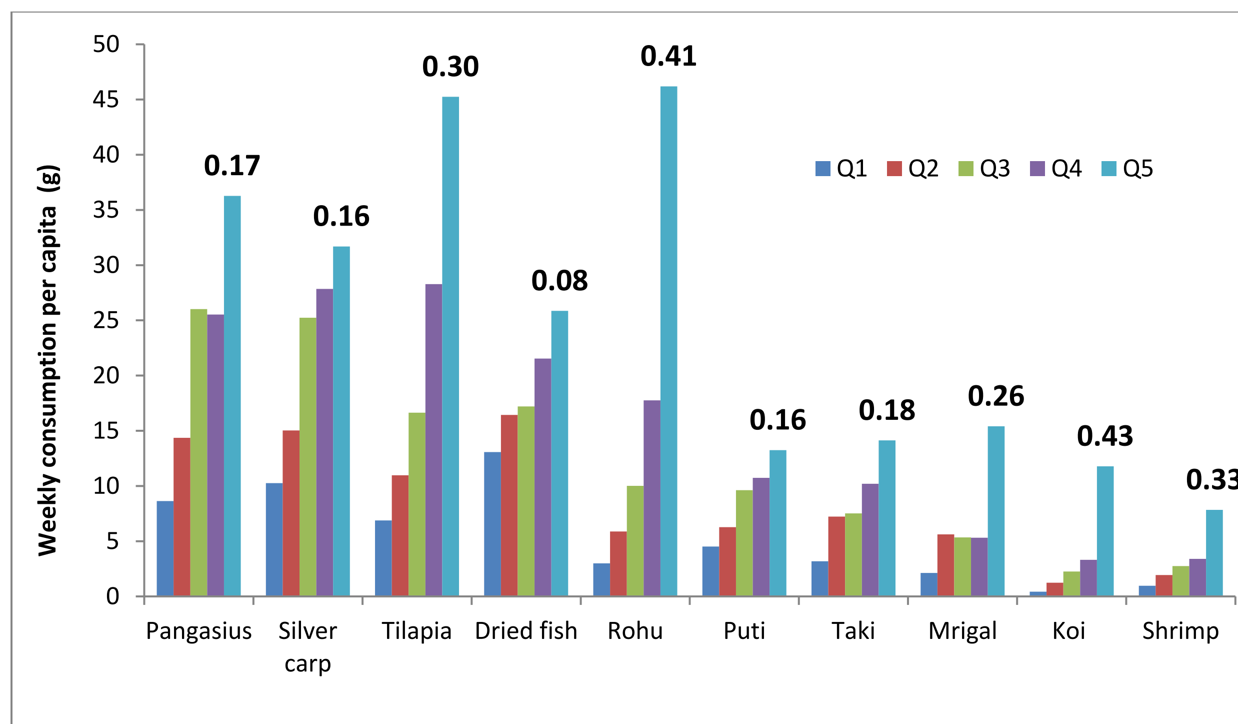


Fig. 10.1: Average weekly consumption per capita (g) and weighted Gini coefficient of consumption of the 10 most consumed fish species in rural Bangladesh (Source: Derived from the of Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey 2011-2012 dataset). Notes: Q1 = expenditure quintile 1, etc.; Gini coefficient of consumption values indicated in bold text above each bar; Values reported for dried fish are wet weight equivalents, calculated using a conversion factor of 3.5.

These characteristics mean that dried fish may contribute significantly toward food and nutrition security - achievement of which is fundamental to material wellbeing - in a country that continues to experience severe levels of malnutrition and associated health problems (Toufique and Belton, 2014). Despite its evident significance, dried fish has received little attention in the fisheries literature and associated policy debates in Bangladesh, or elsewhere. A literature review conducted early on during the research process revealed a dearth of published information on

[1] Data for 56 types of fish were analyzed. Only the 10 most important in terms of consumption are presented. The dataset can be accessed at: http://www.ifpri.org/dataset/bangladesh-integrated-household-survey-bihs-2011-2012

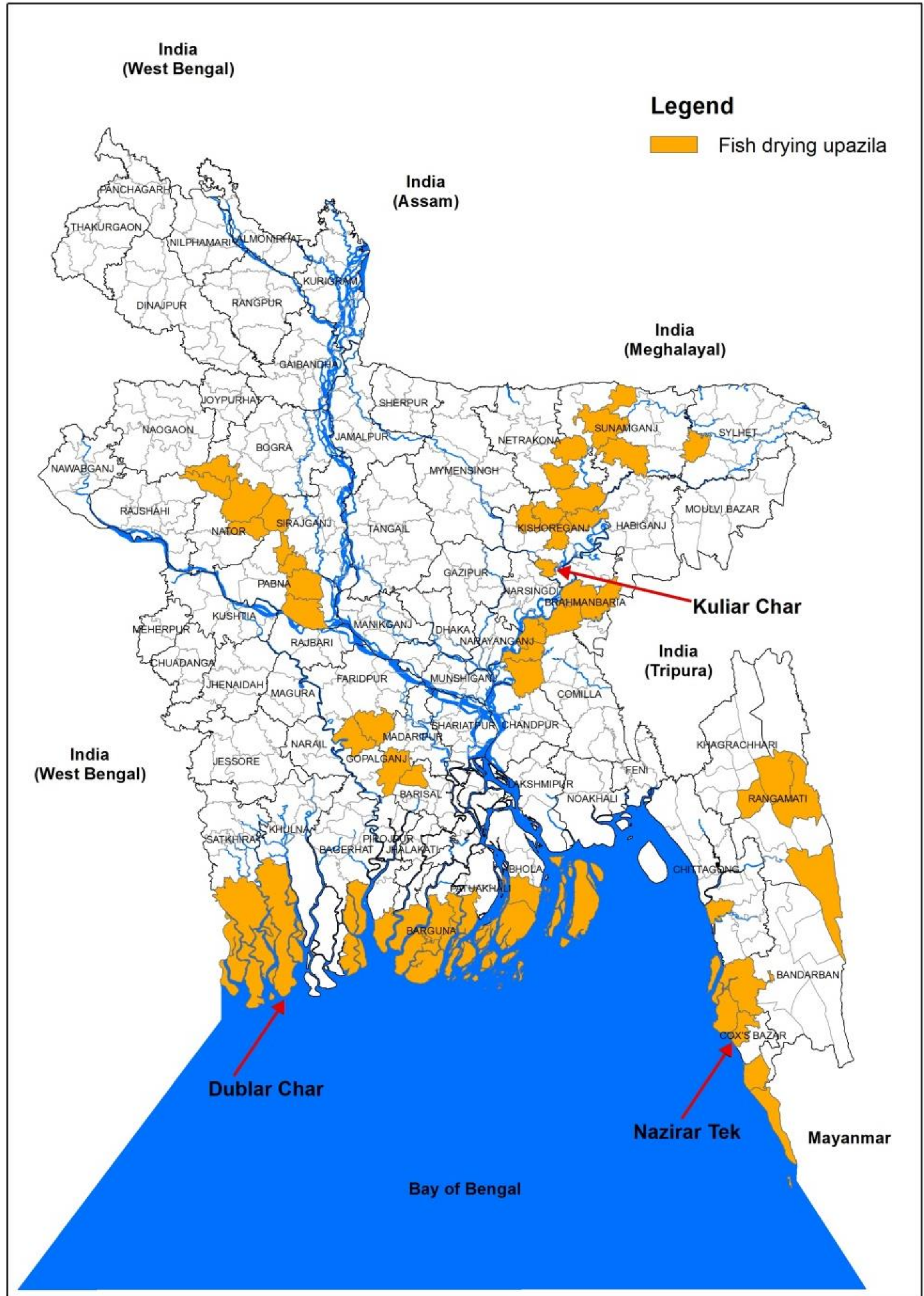
[2] Further analysis of the dataset indicated that consumption of dried fish products was unevenly geographically distributed. Consumption levels of more than 1,000 g (dry weight)/capita/annum were found in Sylhet and Chittagong Divisions to the east, while intakes in the northern Divisions of Dhaka and Rangpur averaged around 800 g/ capita/annum. Much lower levels of consumption were found to the west and south in Rajshahi, Barisal, and Khulna Divisions, the latter with a consumption of just 11 g/capita/annum. These differences reflect strong local cultural preferences, the historical origins of which are unclear.

dried fish production, with most work addressing the subject focusing on exclusively technical matters such as preservation techniques and food safety[3]. These realizations led to the initiation of a study, intended to provide a broad overview of the status of dried fish production, trade and consumption in Bangladesh.

The study was preceded by a telephone survey of sub-district level employees of the Department of Fisheries, to identify the major fish drying locations (this was later supplemented with additional information obtained during field visits). Commercial fish drying sites were identified in 56 sub-districts (*upazila*) in 22 districts (Figure 10.2)[1]. These run almost the entire length of the coastline, which is situated at the apex of the Bay of Bengal: from Cox's Bazar (bordering Myanmar in the southeast) to the Sundarbans mangrove forest (abutting the Indian state of West Bengal to the west); and inland: throughout the Haor Basin (a large expanse of seasonally flooded wetlands in the Northeast); along the floodplains of the Meghna River; around Chalan Beel (a large seasonal wetland in the northwest); and beside Kaptai lake (Bangladesh's largest reservoir, located in the Chittagong Hill Tracts). The number and spread of drying sites is indicative of the geographical extent of drying activities and the significance of their contributions to rural livelihoods in these areas.

[3] The book *Slaves for a season: Bonded child labour in the dried fish industry* (Blanchet et al. 2006) is a notable exception.

Fig. 10.2: Location of fish drying sites in Bangladesh. (Source: Authors' own survey)



10.3 Methodology

A value chain study was initiated with the intent of generating a comprehensive overview of dried fish production and consumption in Bangladesh. In keeping with standard analytical approaches to value chains (e.g. Reardon et al. 2012), the study sought to establish: 1) the structure of the sector, spatially, in terms of the size and location of drying sites and markets, and functionally, in terms of the roles and numbers of actors operating at different nodes; 2) the conduct (behavior) of these actors in terms of their production and provision of goods and services and the nature of their relationships with other actors in the chain; 3) the performance of the value chain as a whole in terms of inclusiveness, efficiency and product quality. The decision was made to focus mainly on the midstream (fish drying) and downstream (marketing) segments of the value chain as it was felt that exploring this range of issues fully with upstream actors (particularly fishers) was not feasible within the time available[4].

During preliminary research it became apparent that fish drying work was highly gendered, and performed under varied conditions, many of which appeared quite exploitative. As a result, a more explicitly wellbeing focused approach was pursued during subsequent rounds of fieldwork, in an attempt to produce deeper understandings of the livelihoods of labourers involved in fish drying, including relational dimensions of power and identity, and their subjective and material consequences. This concept of wellbeing aligns with the "social wellbeing" approach adopted in the introduction to this volume (see also Weeratunge et al. 2013; White 2010). Value chain actors' wellbeing was assessed qualitatively through interpretive analysis of their responses to questions pertaining to a wide range of wellbeing indicators.

Between February 2012 and February 2013, visits were made to a total of 10 wholesale markets, 13 retail markets and 17 fish drying sites, located in 13 districts throughout the country. During this period, 255 partially structured individual and group interviews were conducted with actors involved in dried fish value chains, or pursuing livelihoods in locations where fish drying took place (Table 1). Respondents were sampled purposively in an attempt to ensure coverage the broadest possible range of actors (both in terms of roles in the value chain and their social characteristics, including gender). Despite these efforts, unless otherwise indicated in Table 10.1, all those interviewed were men. 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 in capture fisheries value chains in Bangladesh. Although inland and marine fisheries in Bangladesh that supply raw material for drying are overwhelmingly small-scale in nature, falling along the spectrum of what Johnson (2006) refers to as 'domestic commodity production', for reasons discussed above, actors involved principally in fishing activities accounted for only a relatively small fraction of interviewees[5].

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[4] Following Reardon et al. (2012), the dried fish value chain was divided into three segments for analytical purposes. In the context discussed here, 'upstream' refers to all supply chains providing raw materials (most importantly fresh fish) and other inputs and services that support activities in the 'midstream' segment. 'Midstream' includes all activities related to the transformation of fresh fish into processed product, and its distribution as far as primary wholesale markets. 'Downstream' includes all activities that facilitate trade in and marketing of finished product, from primary wholesale to consumer.

[5] Some of the dried fish producers interviewed operated fishing boats, but utilized most of their catch for drying. They are recorded as dried fish producers in Table 10.1.

Upstream		Midstream		Downstream		Other associated actors	
Fresh fish trader	8	Dried fish producer	59	Dried fish trader	50	Pharmacy worker	3
Fisher	6	Fish drying labourer (female)	22	Dried fish retailer (male)	27	Government official	2
Fishing boat owner	3	Fish drying labourer (male)	18	Fish meal trader	4	Grocery shop worker	2
Boat rental services (transport)	1	Shidol producer*	7	Market labourer	4	Barber	1
Investor in shidol production*	1	Labour head	5	Dried fish retailer (female)	2	Delivery truck toll collector	1
Trader of earthen jars*	1	Dried shark producer	3	Dried fish trader's labourer	1	Herbal doctor	1
		Shrimp trader	3	Shark fin trader	1	Local government official	1
		Owner of warehouse for shidol storage*	3			Mobile phone service worker	1
		Shidol processing labour*	2			NGO worker	1
		Fish drying labourer (child)	2			Priest	1
		Fish processing byproduct trader	2			Tea stall owner	1
		Fishmeal producer	2				
		Accountant	1				
		Fermented shrimp producer	1				
		Financial service provider	1				
Total number of interviews	**20**		**131**		**89**		**15**

Table 10.1: Summary of interviews conducted with actors in the dried fish value chain (Note: *Shidol* (also called *chapa*) is a fermented fish product, widely eaten throughout North Bengal. It is usually produced using freshwater *puti* (*Puntius spp.*), or marine *phaisa* (*Setipinna spp.*) which is first dried, then soaked in water, drained and matured for several months in earthen jars.

10.4 Labour, Identity and Wellbeing: Three Case Studies

This section presents case studies detailing labour relations and fish worker wellbeing at three major sites of production - selected for their contrasting characteristics in terms of organization of production and related wellbeing outcomes - which, together, contribute a substantial share of domestic dried fish supply[6]. These are: Nazirartek, Bangladesh's second largest marine fish drying site, close to the city of Cox's Bazar; Dublar Char, an island deep inside in the Sundarbans mangrove forest, which is the location of the country's largest concentration of marine drying operations, and; Daspara, one of the largest freshwater fish dying sites in northern Bangladesh (Figure 2).

10.4.1 Nazirartek

10.4.1.1 History and Organization of Fish Drying at Nazirartek

Cox's Bazar is the principle city of Cox's Bazar district. Fish drying takes place on an accreting strip of coastal land called Nazirartek, located immediately to the west of Cox's Bazar airport, at the mouth of the Bhakkali River. Most fish drying in Nazirartek is controlled by former inhabitants of Kutubdia, an island 45 km to the north. Residents of coastal fishing communities in Kutubdia were granted formal permission to settle an area of emerging land close to the airport in 1987, after being displaced from Kutubdia by severe coastal erosion. These Muslim migrants occupied land and established fish drying operations on the seaward side of the new

[6] Bangladesh is a net importer of dried fish, sourcing significant quantities of dried marine product from neighbouring India and Myanmar, particularly outside the periods of domestic peak production

settlement. A second larger wave of in-migration from Kutubdia occurred four years later, in 1991, in the aftermath of a devastating cyclone which left part of the island submerged.

Between 1987 and 2013, the beach shifted 2 km seaward, creating new land on which additional dwellings and drying operations were constructed, and the size of the settlement and fish drying area grew to 140 ha, attracting new migrants from Kutubdia and elsewhere in the country. The number of permanently settled households has grown to around 4500, most of which possess at least one member involved in activities related to fishing or fish drying, for a total permanent population well in excess of 20,000. The expansion of drying operations in Nazirartek coincided with the displacement of 250,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar to Cox's Bazar district in 1992 (Ahmed, 2010)[7]. During the fish drying season from mid-August to mid-April, the permanent population is swelled by more than 5000 seasonal workers and their family members. Many are Rohingya, while others originate from other parts of Cox's Bazar and more distant regions of Bangladesh. These workers and their families are housed in extremely basic accommodation, constructed close to the drying area, with most families sharing a single room made of bamboo and reeds, rented at a cost of around USD 5/month[8].

Enclosures where fish are dried are called *khola*. Around 80% of khola at Nazirartek belong to families originating from Kutubdia. The peak fishing season runs during the six post-monsoon months of October to March. Fish landings are very closely related to the lunar cycle, peaking several days after the full and new moon when boats (which are motorized, and fish principally with set bag nets), return from several days at sea. More limited volumes of fish are landed in between these times. Boats with owners originating from locations in Cox's Bazar and neighbouring Chittagong district land fish for drying daily on the nearby beach. Landings are comprised mainly of small species, juveniles and damaged or partially spoiled fish, all with a low market value. Higher market value fish are generally sold direct to traders in fresh form at wholesale markets in other locations. The four species dried in the largest volumes are *chhuri*, (hairtail), *loitya*, (Bombay duck), *poa* (panna croaker) and *phaisa* (Gangetic anchovy). Heavily spoiled fish and aquatic organisms such as small crabs are dried separately for use in the production of fish and animal feeds. Drying usually takes around three days for each batch of fish.

With the exception of product sold into markets in the immediate area, all dried fish produced at Nazirartek is sold through Bangladesh's largest dried fish wholesale market, Asadganj, located in the large port city of Chittagong, 130 km to the north. All dried fish traded at Asadganj is sold through large traders (*arotdar*), who provide advances of output-tied working capital at the beginning of the fishing/drying season. Boat owners who need funds to furnish advanced wages in order to secure the services of crews for their fishing boats are the main recipients of this form of credit (*dadon*), but it is also provided to some khola operators without boats, as well as to smaller itinerant traders who act as collectors. This practice guarantees large volumes of trade for arotdars, who receive a commission for brokering sales between dried fish producers and wholesalers at Asadganj.

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[7] The Rohingya are an ethnic group of South Asian origin who practise Islam and inhabit Rakhine State, in the west of Buddhist majority Myanmar. They have been rendered stateless and subjected to state-led persecution and communal violence since the mid-20th century, resulting in several mass migrations to Muslim majority Bangladesh.
[8] USD 1 was worth approximately BDT 80 during the period when fieldwork took place

10.4.1.2 Labour, Identity and Wellbeing

Demand for fish drying labour corresponds with the lunar cycle, with two high and two low weeks each month. A flexible labour force is thus required, and most workers are hired on a daily basis. These casual labourers, who often lack alternative employment options, are usually able to find work for around 15 days per month, but sometimes as few as 10. The working day runs from dawn to dusk (roughly 6.00 am to 6.00 pm), and there is a strong gender division of labour. Men perform tasks which include washing fresh fish, applying pesticides to prevent fly infestation, hanging fish up to dry on scaffolding, 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. At least 50% of the causal labourers employed are women.

Women and men casual labourers earn USD 1.85 and USD 2.50 respectively, for a full day's work. This figure is reduced when the working day is shorter due to insufficient supplies of fish. Wages are distributed in cash at the end of each day. Children of both genders are employed in significant numbers, with children under 12 years accounting for an estimated 10% of the total casual workforce. Starting from the age of six or seven years, children earn from USD 0.4-0.6/day and, by around the age of 15 years, up to an adult equivalent wage. No food is provided to casual workers by their employers. A typical khola also employs several male supervisors (*nila*) on a seasonal basis. Nila earn a lump sum of USD 400-600 for a nine month season, part of which is paid as a cash advance, and are provided accommodation in the khola and a daily ration of rice, fish and vegetables.

At least half the women and child casual workers involved in fish drying at Nazirartek are Rohingya. Most Rohingya in Bangladesh are not formally registered as refugees and are thus undocumented and ineligible to receive formal humanitarian assistance or basic public services (Ahmed 2010). Fish drying workers of Bengali ethnic origin are mainly landless seasonal migrants from elsewhere in Cox's Bazar district and more distant parts of the country where there are few employment opportunities, as well as the poorest of the former inhabitants of Kutubdia to have settled permanently at Nazirartek. Although members of all three groups are evidently extremely poor, they appear to experience slightly different levels of deprivation, with those originating from Kutubdia at the least severe end of the scale, and those from Myanmar at the worst. Rohingya and Bengali (Bangladeshi) workers receive the same daily wage, but it is widely reported by Bengali workers and khola operators that the availability of Rohingya labour has depressed average wage rates considerably. This perception, which was also reported by Blanchet et al. (2006), is a source of resentment among Bengali workers.

In part because of this economic competition, relations between the two groups are often strained. Bengali interviewees originating from Kutubdia referred to themselves as "*sthanio lok"* (local people), in contrast to the "*bideshi*" (foreign) Roghingya, who they widely characterized as troublemakers or thieves and criticized for "contaminating local culture" by practising polygamy or cohabiting. It was noted that Bengalis rarely ate food cooked by Rohinga or allowed them to visit their homes, and that arranged marriages never occurred between the two groups. As a result, most Rohingya felt their position to be precarious, a sentiment captured in the comment that "[our] status is always lower than that of Bengalis. We bow our heads [in front

of them]". Rohingya also confront a variety of more systemic exclusions from wider society, in addition to those engendered by everyday discursive practices. As undocumented refugees, they are vulnerable to harassment by the authorities when moving outside Nazirartek, and reported arbitrary arrests by the police, often followed by extortion or violence, to be commonplace. They are also disqualified from receiving relief occasionally disbursed by NGOs and the government and unable to access formal microfinance, and Rohingya children are prohibited from attending the few NGO- and community-run schools in the vicinity of Nazirartek.

The proportion of women without husbands as a result of widowhood, divorce or abandonment, is very high among all casual female labourers employed in fish drying (estimated at more than 1/3), but this tendency is seemingly particularly acute in the case the Rohingya. Blanchet et al. (2006) also reported that 58% of child workers at Nazirartek had lost one or both parents. Whilst all of these groups are highly vulnerable, Rohingya women and girls without the protection of a husband or male family member are particularly at risk of sexual violence and exploitation, especially from male khola managers with the power to grant or withhold work. This situation prevails in part because Rohingya exist outside of local moral society (*samaj*), and have little recourse to or faith in the justice dispensed by informal community hearings (*salish*), which are controlled by khola operators (c.f. Blanchet et al. 2006). This extreme vulnerability appears to be reflected in the high prevalence of polygamous marriages among Rohingya in Nazirartek. Such marriages, which informants reported did not occur among Rohingya in Myanmar, may be interpreted as a "Faustian bargain" on the part of many of the women involved, entered into in the desperate pursuit of a degree of security (Wood 2003).

In addition to relational determinants of ill-being specific to Rohingya workers, all fish drying workers interviewed confronted numerous common material impediments to wellbeing. Sanitation around the areas of permanent and rented worker accommodation is very poor, with communal open pit latrines used by very large numbers of people. Working conditions are harsh (long hours exposed to the elements and frequent contact with pesticides), and the diet is poor, comprised mainly of rice and low quality fish. Meal skipping was reported as a very common coping strategy on days when no work is available. A range of common health complaints, including diarrhea, backache, headache, sunburn and skin conditions were reported. Access to education is limited, even for the children of Bengali workers eligible to attend school, because, apart from the costs associated with doing so, children are often required to care for their younger siblings whilst parents work, or to contribute to household income by working themselves or by scavenging fish in and around the khola.

10.4.1.3 Fisher Wellbeing

It is instructive to compare the conditions experienced by fish drying workers with those of members of the fisher community originating from Kutubdia. Crews of fishing vessels are exclusively male. They perform a variety of skilled and semi-skilled work essential for successful fishing operations, resulting in competition among boat owners to recruit them prior to the fishing season. The salary for a nine month season ranges from USD 450 to1500, depending on experience, with 50% paid as an advance to secure the worker's commitment. Members of fishing crews received four meals a day while at sea, in recognition of the degree of physical exertion involved in their work. In order to cover these and numerous other costs, boat owners borrow heavily before the start of each season, from traders of both dried and fresh fish,

in the form of output-tied credit (dadon), committing them to sell exclusively through these creditors.

Fishing is dangerous and physically demanding, with death and injury due to bad weather and piracy relatively frequent occurrences. Unlike fish drying labourers, fishing boat crews and captains both have professional associations which represent their interests in the case of disagreements with employers. Most crew members originate from the same communities and clans as boat owners and thus share common place and kin-based identities. Although professional fishers openly self-identify as such, their status is ambiguous. In discussing their work, fishers originating from Kutubdia made reference to the hard-earned skills and long experience needed to fish successfully which, they argued, would be impossible for an "outsider" to replicate, suggesting a degree of pride in their work. However, respondents also recognized that, as hereditary fishers, they were involved in a 'dishonourable' profession (Barman 2008)[9], and wished for their children to pursue different occupations. Acknowledgement of this low social status and physical insecurity was reflected by a boat owner who noted that, "If I have a girl and I want to her to get married, I will always look for a man with a permanent job and will try to avoid a boat captain". As a community, the former inhabitants of Kutubdia have attempted to ensure this social mobility can occur, by making investments in education, including building schools and sending their children to university to enable them to obtain jobs in state institutions.

Fishers from Kutubdia possessed sufficient social and political capital to enable them to secure official permission to colonize the areas around Nazirartek after the natural disasters that affected Kutubdia during the 1980s and early 1990s, as well as access to capital from traders that enabled them to rapidly rebuild their fishing livelihoods in the face of massive losses of productive assets. As a result, they proved far more resilient to displacement than the Rohingya who work for them. The Rohingyas' statelessness deprives them of one of the most basic conditions of political identity, subjecting them to extreme marginalization, and rendering them an abundant source of cheap and easily disciplined labour, exploitation of which contributes to the material wellbeing of the fisher community.

Although members of male fishing crews perform a role which entails a high degree of physical risk and some social censure, it also affords then a degree of satisfaction and belonging, as well as financial conditions which, while by no means comfortable, are considerably better than those enjoyed by women fish drying labourers. Wellbeing outcomes for the former group are therefore generally mixed. For the latter group, fish drying work appears to represent little more than a survival mechanism of last resort, entered into from a position of extreme economic and social disempowerment, and symptomatic of extremely low overall levels of social wellbeing.

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[9] In Bengal, fishing was traditionally a profession dominated by specific low-caste Hindu groups. However, fishing and fish trading were also the hereditary professions of several groups of Muslims, for whom caste-like characteristics in terms of the social segregation to which they were subject were applied (Barman 2008). More recently, the entry of Muslims from outside these hereditary groups into fishing businesses has increased. Recent entrants are not subject to the same degree of stigma as those who inherited their profession. However, as the text above indicates, this persists to some degree for those whose forebears were professional fishers by birth.

10.4.2 Dublar Char

10.4.2.1 Fish Drying on Dublar Char

Dublar Char is a remote island in Bagerhat district, at the southernmost tip of the Sundarbans Reserve Forest; a protected area which contains the largest intact mangrove ecosystem in the world. The island, which lies a 10 hour boat journey away from the nearest urban centre, has no permanent residents, and is the location of the greatest concentration of fish drying operations in Bangladesh. Fishers from Chittagong and Cox's Bazar districts have made the annual 250 km boat journey across the Bay of Bengal to establish seasonal fishing camps on Dublar Char for more than 200 years. The first fishers to frequent the island were Hindus, belonging to a low status professional fishing caste. Muslims reportedly began to enter the Dublar Char fishery in increasing numbers from the 1970s, but Hindus appear to remain in the majority.

Fishing camps run for around five months (October - February) in four locations; Alor Kol to the southwest of the island, and Majer Killa, Meher Ali and Office Killa in the south and southeast[10]. There are around 700 khola at Alor Kol, where fishers are comprised of a mix of low-caste Hindus and Muslims from the nearby districts of Khulna, Shatkhira, Bagherhat, Barguna and Pirojpur, many of whom are relative latecomers to the fishery. Much smaller numbers of khola are found at each of the other three sites in the south and east of the island. These sites are occupied by fishers originating from southeast Bangladesh and operate on a large scale, each producing around six times more fish products on average, than those at Alor Kol (Huda and Haque 2001). The total population of Dublar Char during fish drying season was reported to be 24,840 in 2000 (Huda and Haque 2001), and 28,000 in 2004 (Blanchet et al. 2006), but interviewees in 2013 provided a lower estimate of around 20,000[11].

All khola operators on Dublar Char own fishing boats, and only dry fish that they themselves land. Boat owners (*bohaddar*) from southeast Bangladesh usually operate several vessels, each around 45 feet in length. Those from southwest Bangladesh tend to operate fewer, smaller vessels, closer to shore. Most boats are motorized, and fish using set bag nets. Some high value fresh fish and shrimp (together comprising about 15% of landings) is sold to traders operating depots on the island. Around 70% of the total catch is dried for sale as human food, and the remaining 15% is 'trash fish', which is dried for use as an ingredient in fish and animal feeds.

Dublar Char has no women inhabitants or workers. Interviewees explained this with reference to the belief that women's presence on the island (which is considered sacred by Hindus) outside of a large annual pilgrimage (*Rash Mela*) would "pollute" it. The fishing camps on Dublar Char are monitored by the Forest Department, which levies taxes on fishers for the use of wood, operation of fishing boats and export of dried fish out of the forest reserve. The coast guard and police also have an occasional presence, but neither institution has the capacity to protect fishers against pirate gangs, which frequently kidnap fishers for ransom.

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[10] Fish drying also occurs at four sites on a nearby island sometimes also considered part of Dublar Char, but these are of lesser importance, and were not visited in this study.

11 This difference may be due to declining numbers of fish drying operations on the island since 2010, as a result of piracy.

The presence of fishers on the island in the face of this insecurity is facilitated by the presence of a powerful shrimp trading business. The business is operated by a former army Major; a military sub-sector commander in the Sundarbans during Bangladesh's war of independence against Pakistan in 1971, who continues to maintain an independent armed presence in the region. The Major's business has commandeered three public cyclone shelters as operational bases on the island. Although controlling this territory in a semi-autonomous manner, (placing them in an ambiguous position vis-à-vis the state), the Major and his business associates have cooperated closely with the police's paramilitary wing in coordinating raids against pirate gangs, and also act as an informal court, arbitrating disputes among fishers on the island.

In return for the patronage they receive, bohaddar at the three drying sites in the south and east of the island, located close to the shrimp trader's bases, are compelled to sell all of the fresh shrimp they land to the Major's business, at very heavily discounted rates[12]. Anyone caught attempting to sell shrimp on the open market is punished, and expelled from the island. Bohaddar working out of these three sites are also bound to provide all of their 'trash fish' to the shrimp trading business, free of charge. The protection from piracy received by bohaddar at Alor Kol is more limited, and they are free to sell their 'trash fish' as they wish, earning several hundred dollars per season from doing so. However, many of the Alor Kol based bohaddar also take cash advances (dadon) from the shrimp business, obligating them to sell all the fresh shrimp landed to its agents at heavily discounted prices.

The shrimp trading business provides a range of additional services to fishers which would be otherwise difficult to obtain on the remote island. These include selling provisions and fuel, supplying engine parts, repairs, emergency credit and providing mobile phone access through signal boosting aerials. The shrimp business also runs two cargo boats with a monopoly on the transport of fish dried from Alor Kol to the port of Mongla (use of which guarantees that the cargo will not be stolen on route by pirates), and manages subsequent transport of this product by road to wholesale markets in Chittagong (Asadganj), and Syedpur in the northwest of the country.

10.4.2.2 Labour and Wellbeing

The fishing and drying operations run by fishers at Alor Kol are smaller on average than at the three other drying sites on Dublar Char. Some boat owners based at Alor Kol work on their own vessels, and fishing crews participate in drying activities on-shore. A small number of additional staff are also employed exclusively for drying fish in each khola. The majority of these workers originate from the same areas of southwest Bangladesh as the boat owners, though not always from the same communities, and are not always hereditary fishers by profession. Labourers who only dry fish earn wages of USD 250-375 for a five month season; around 50% less than boat crew members. All these workers are usually paid an advance at the start of the season equal to two months' wages, and are free to leave the island if the value of the advance has been worked off. Some pay visits to their homes in neighbouring districts on one or more occasions during the drying season.

[12] The protection afforded from piracy is not total. In 2010, a bohaddar was captured in a mass raid on his fishing camp at Meher Ali, and held at ransom for USD 70,000. The extremity of this event caused a reduction in fishing activity in subsequent years.

Different relations of production prevail at the three other drying sites, where fishers originate mainly from the more distant southeastern districts of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar. Bohaddar at these locations never fish themselves, managing operations from shore and assigning leadership of fishing crews to boat captains (*mahji*). Bohaddar provide cash advances directly to mahji and their crews (most of whom originate from the same communities as their employers), prior to the start of the fishing season. There is a strong degree of commitment from the bohaddar to his fishing crews, to the extent that he will always pay the ransom demanded for a crew member kidnapped by pirates, even if it means selling his business to do so. Fishing operations at these drying sites are much larger than those found on Alor Kol, boats are at sea for longer periods of time, and fishing crews do not participate in fish drying. Fish drying work at these sites is performed by two distinct groups of labour (*kuliya* and *dhulabanga*), recruited and employed under different conditions.

Kuliya are recruited mainly from within the same fishing communities as their employers, by fishing camp managers (*kuliya mahji*). They are mainly of young men and adolescents, with a minority aged as young as ten years old. Bohaddar specify the number of kuliya they require and provide cash advances to kuliya mahji with which to recruit them, paying a fixed amount per worker. Kuliya mahji make their income for the season from the difference between the amount received for hiring workers and the cost of paying and feeding them. The wages earned by kuliya are within the same range as those earned by workers drying fish at Alor Kol (USD 250-325 per season plus meals). Kuliya receive part of their wages as an advance, which secures a commitment to work for the entire season. The origin of most kuliya, kuliya mahji and bohaddar within the same communities ensures a certain degree of reciprocal responsibility; providing some insurance against the former absconding with advance wages, while the latter may be held somewhat accountable for the welfare of the workforce.

In contrast, dhulabanga originate from outside fishing communities, mainly from the landless, unemployed and often homeless 'floating population' (Blanchet et al. 2006) who migrate from all over the country to Chittagong city in search of work. Although dhulabanga are characterized predominantly as children in some accounts (e.g. Jensen 2013), the general trend observed during the fieldwork was for children to be less frequently represented among the dhulabanga than among kuliya. It is possible that this tendency reflects the impact of successive media exposés and ensuing raids on fishing camps by the authorities.

Also in contrast to previous reports, including Blanchet et al. (2006), dhulabanga appeared to be fewer in number than kuliya, with their presence only immediately apparent at Meher Ali, where they accounted for roughly 70% of the labour engaged for fish drying, and about one third of the entire workforce including fishing crews. The total population of dulabhanga in the four khola operating on Meher Ali was estimated at around 300. This is far fewer than 10,000 estimated to have worked on the whole of Dublar Char during the 2003-04 drying season by Blanchet et al. (2006). This apparent decline in numbers may reflect the effects of both pressure from the authorities and the declining number of drying operations on the south and east of the island since 2010 due to rampant piracy.

Responsibility for recruiting dhulabanga is out-sourced by bohaddar to labour heads (*dhulabanga mahji*), prior to the beginning of each season. Dhulabanga mahji recruit some

labour themselves, but are usually unable to obtain sufficient numbers, and are thus reliant on brokers (*dalal*) from Chittagong to bring them workers. Dalal recruit with promises of well remunerated work under good conditions, and transport workers to fishing villages in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar, where they are handed over to dhulabanga mahji for a fee of USD 6-8 each; a transaction known as *puya bikri* - literally meaning, "selling a boy" (Blanchet et al. 2006).

During the period prior to their journey by boat to Dublar Char, dhulabanga are accommodated by dhulabanga mahji under good conditions, and are well fed and provided with new clothing and footwear. This treatment changes dramatically after they board the boat to Dublar Char (Blanchet et al. 2006). Once on the island, they are put to work at cutting wood to construct drying areas and housing, unloading fish and nets from boats, sorting fresh fish prior to drying, collecting fire wood, preparing nets and fetching drinking water. This work begins early in the morning, and can continue long into the night when large quantities of fish are landed.

Bohaddar do not pay dhulabanga mahji for their services in cash. Instead, they provide payment in kind, at the rate of two baskets of fresh fish out of every 30 unloaded from the fishing boats by their workers (a 7% share of the total catch). In addition to their work obligations to bohaddar, dhulabanga are required to dry this fish for their mahji, who sell it to visiting traders. The seasonal profit earned by dhulabanga mahji is the gross value of sales of the fish dried by his team, minus the costs of purchasing these workers from dalal and covering their living costs and wages during the fishing season. This calculation provides an incentive reduce costs as much as possible, by 'squeezing' the dhulabanga, particularly in poor fishing years.

The food provided to the dhulabanga is poor, comprised primarily of two meals a day of rice and fish, with few vegetables. Stomach complaints, health problems and work injuries are commonplace. Snacks and medicines are available for dhulabanga to purchase from shops on the island, through a line of credit to their mahji. The costs, which are inflated, are deducted from their salaries at the end of the season, along with outlay on the clothes provided prior to the journey and any other items purchased during their stay on the island. Thus, although most dhulabanga are promised a wage of USD 65-125 for the entire season by their mahji (a figure much below that initially offered by the dalal who recruited them), once all costs are deducted at the season's end, many receive no cash at all. They are, in the words of Blanchet et al. (2006), 'slaves for a season'.

The extremely remote location of Dublar Char, together with the risk posed by the presence of tigers and crocodiles in the mangrove forest that surround it, make escape from the island difficult, and the possibility of encountering these animals is used by dhulabanga mahji as an instrument of fear, to reduce the temptation for dhulabanga to run away. In order to ensure acquiescence under the heavy workloads and poor conditions, dhulabanga are also heavily disciplined, both verbally and physically. As one interviewee observed, on their arrival to the island, "they are [treated] like wild animals; they are beaten until they surrender". Blanchet et al. (2006) also reported that sexual abuse is common.

All of these factors equate to what can only be described as extremely low levels of all dimensions of wellbeing among the dhulabanga. The material deficiencies are obvious: most dhulabanga are destitute even before coming to Dublar Char, a status which does not improve during their time on the island, being poorly nourished, un- or under-paid, and subjected to

extremes of physical endurance and punishment. Damage to their subjective wellbeing wrought by this experience was apparent in the emotions of anger, regret, fear and frustration with which they relayed their life stories. These feelings were captured succinctly by a former garment factory worker, who stated categorically that Dublar Char was "like hell", that the biggest mistake of his life was being tricked by the dalal, whom he hoped the dalal would be punished somehow, and that he wished to return to his old life and never come back to Dublar Char. Relational dimensions of wellbeing are particularly important in contributing to these material and subjective outcomes. As in Nazirartek, the distinction between "locals" (belonging to the fishing communities of southeast Bangladesh) and "foreigners" (placeless dhulabanga recruited from the 'floating population' of Chittagong city) was emphasized in the discourse of the former. For fishers, this dichotomy serves the function of locating the dhulabanga outside their own moral society (samaj), thereby absolving them of the type of social obligations extended to kuliya and fishing boat crews. The consequences of this discursive practice are reinforced by out-sourcing responsibility for the management and recruitment of dhulabanga; from bohaddar, to dhulabanga mahji, to dalal.

Blanchet et al. (2006) report that dhulabanga are referred to by their mahji as *goru* (cows); a similar discursive practice which serves, symbolically, to dehumanize the dhulabanga and legitimate their exploitation. In contrast, although bound to their employers by cash advances and unable to leave the island at will (and thus, by definition, unfree labourers), kuliya are hired at market rates and perform work which is less physically demanding (mainly sorting and drying fish) and for fewer hours each day, than that of the dhulabanga. The surplus value of labour extracted from "foreign" dhulabanga, thus to some extent, subsidizes that of the "local" workers, originating from within fishing communities.

10.4.2 Daspara

10.4.3.1 Fish Drying Organization and Community

Daspara is a village with a population of around 5,000, located immediately adjacent to the small town of Kuliarchar in Kishoreganj district, northern Bangladesh. The town and village are accessible by surfaced road, and are served by several primary and secondary schools, a girls' high school, several government offices and a fresh fish wholesale market. Both settlements lie on a tributary of one of Bangladesh's three great rivers, the Meghna, and 15 km from the town of Bhoirab, home to one of the country's largest fresh fish wholesale markets. Daspara's inhabitants are Hindus belonging to the low status *Jhol Das* (literally, "water slave") professional fishing sub-caste. All are members of a single *gushti* (patrilineal clan). The village's residents own very little agricultural land or livestock, and the vast majority of families are involved in fishing or fishing-related activities to some degree.

Fish drying has taken place in Daspara for at least 100 years. The drying season runs for five and half months, from October to mid-March. The main species dried from October to December are *puti* (small fish, which are the most prolific flood plain species in Bangladesh). Larger, higher market value species including catfishes, snakeheads, and Indian minor carp (*boal, ayr, gozar, shol, gonia*), account for a greater share of the catch later in the season. Drying takes place on bamboo platforms (*dangy*), elevated about three meters above the ground on stilts, which are constructed during late monsoon before deep floodwaters subside.

Puti are prepared for drying by descaling and removing the internal organs with a sharp blade. Larger fish are usually de-scaled, de-headed, cleaned, butterflied, sliced and soaked in salt water before drying. In both cases, the fishes' internal organs are retained. Heads and entrails of some of the larger fish are sold fresh for food in the locality, while swim bladders are dried and traded. When boiled, the intestines of puti and gonia produce oil which is used for coating earthen jars used in the production of a fermented product (*shidol*), made from dried puti[13].

10.4.3.2 Labour and Wellbeing

Dangy are usually managed as a family enterprise, in which husband and wife are often both actively engaged. Dangy owners' extended family members are often given preference as labour, with additional casual workers recruited from within the village, as required. Owner's children sometimes contribute their labour when not at school, but almost all children in the village (both girls and boys) are educated to class eight or beyond, and only 1-2% of the dangy workforce are children under 12 years of age. All workers, with the exception of immediate family members, are paid for their labour. Women perform all work related to the preparation of fish for drying, with the exception of washing and salting. This is done by men, as is purchasing fresh fish for processing, guarding the dangy at night, stacking, weighing, bagging and selling dried fish, and making shidol.

Permanent male workers are paid a little over USD 60 per month plus meals. Temporary male labourers earn just over USD 3 per day in cash. Women receive most of their wages as payment in kind in the form of fish processing by-products, but may also receive a cash piece rate for certain tasks. Women workers processing fresh puti retain fishes' intestines and, following each shift, spend around a further hour at home boiling them to render oil which can be stored and sold to shidol makers. Women who specialize in processing larger species retain the heads and internal organs, which are sold immediately to local hawkers who peddle them in neighbouring villages as a cheap food. Boal and gonia swim bladders are dried and sold back to dangy owners, to be re-sold to visiting traders for export.

Although not connected to the lunar cycle, the intensity of fish drying work at Daspara depends on both the stage of the season and volume and species of fish available in local wholesale markets, and is thus quite variable. Working hours are determined by the quantity of fish to be processed in the dangy, and can last anywhere from a few hours in the morning, to long into the night. Furthermore, the quantity of oil that can be extracted from puti declines as the season progresses and the fish near sexual maturity. These complexities make it very difficult to ascertain the exact cash equivalent value of women's in kind earnings. However, rough approximations suggest that these amount to considerably less than men's daily wages, and are of a similar order to, or in some cases perhaps even less than, the daily wages of women labourers at Nazirartek, despite the availability of a much larger reserve army of labour at the latter location.

[13] A marine fish, phaisa, is increasingly used in shidol production as a substitute for the freshwater puti, which is becoming scarcer and more expensive. The lower value shidol produced using phaisa is consumed almost exclusively in the impoverished Northeast of the country.

Despite comparable earnings, the general wellbeing of women fish drying workers at Daspara and Nazirartek appears very different. This reflects, in part, differences in the degree of social inclusion/marginalization experienced by the two groups. Rohingya women workers at Nazirartek exist precariously, outside the "local" society of the fishing community and at the hidden margins of the wider nation state. In contrast, women drying fish in Daspara are deeply embedded in their own community and its moral economy. This status is double-edged, at once affording a sense of belonging and security which is completely absent among the Rohingya in Nazirartek, and obliging them to perform work out of a sense of duty to employers (often relatives or neighbours) under poorly remunerated conditions, in order to maintain harmonious relations within the community.

To the extent that they are intimately tied to their employers through interlinked kinship and place-based identities, women's work in Daspara can be seen as the self-exploitation occurring at the collective, community level, rather than at the individual or household scale, as usually conceived in agrarian political economy. However, voluntary as it may be, the burden of communal self-exploitation falls almost entirely on women, as is evident from comparison with male fish drying workers, who are invariably paid in cash and receive approximately twice the daily wage of their female counterparts.

At Nazirartek, earnings from fish drying are fundamental to the day-to-day survival of women workers and their families, with little option but to, quite literally, work or starve. In contrast, money earned by women in Daspara makes an important, though usually non-essential contribution to the household economy, and is also spent by women on discretionary purchases such as cosmetics, clothing, jewelry, or (in the case of one interviewee) snacks for grandchildren. This position of relative material wellbeing is in stark contrast to that of Rohingya women workers in Nazirartek, one of whom commented bleakly that, "Our small children never even get to buy five taka [USD 0.06] worth of snacks".

10.5 Conclusions

10.5.1 Explaining Labour Relations in Terms of Identity and Wellbeing

As the case studies presented above demonstrate, small-scale fishing in Bangladesh (particularly in the marine environment) is an economic activity characterized by a high degree of risk and uncertainty (Allison and Ellis 2001; Islam 2011). These characteristics result from factors that include the temporal and spatial variability of fish stocks, an unpredictable and often treacherous environment (e.g. coastal erosion, storms, cyclones), and piracy. Fishers' dependence on patrons for access to capital and (on Dublar Char) physical security, results in additional, though more predictable, financial pressures. Fish drying, which utilizes the vast majority of fish landed in the two marine fisheries studied, as well as a substantial proportion of landings in the inland fishery, is labour intensive. Competition for the limited pool of specialized labour necessary for successful fishing efforts is stiff, as evidenced by the large advances paid to secure fishers' commitment to work. As such, the unskilled labour utilized for fish drying is one of the few areas in which there is scope for fishing enterprises to reduce operating costs.

Operators of fishing and drying enterprises thus attempt to minimize costs and exposure to risk by transferring them, wherever possible, to fish drying workers. Strategies for the exploitation of

fish drying labour (in both a Marxian and more normative sense) assumed different forms, in each of the cases studied, reflecting adaptations to the opportunities and circumstances apparent in different geo-social settings. These arrangements encompass a variety of free and unfree labour relations, as well as gendered forms of collective self-exploitation. At Nazirartek, settlement of newly formed land by fishing households displaced by natural disasters and the expansion of marine fish drying, coincided with an influx of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, lowering labour costs by creating competition with members of poorer households within the fishing community for work. On Dublar Char, demand for cheap and pliant workers was met in part through the creation of a pool of unfree labour operating under conditions of transitory slavery; an arrangement made possible by the island's remoteness, which places it almost beyond the reach of state governance, rendering it an effective prison colony. In Daspara, much of the burden of providing cheap and flexible labour was shifted onto women members of the fishing community itself, in part through everyday discourses around duty and belonging.

In addition to taking large cash advances to cover operating costs, dried fish producers are also often obliged to sell part of their output on credit, resulting in frequent difficulties with cash flow. All the labour arrangements described above serve the purpose of minimizing cash outlays and ensuring the existence of a constantly available but highly flexible supply of low-cost labour which can be utilized on demand to process widely fluctuating volumes of raw material. Evidence for this is provided by the existence of payment in kind and piece rate work at all sites studied. This was most obvious at Daspara (where the vast majority of women workers' income was in the form of fish processing byproducts), but was also evident on Dublar Char (where dhulabanga mahji received a share of the catch as payment, transferring the risk of a poor season from bohaddar to dhulabanga mahji and, ultimately, to the dhulabanga.) In Nazirartek, khola operators gave small quantities of fresh fish to workers from time to time, but in some cases allowed workers opt for a small cash payment instead, indicating the implicit function of fish provided in this way as a wage in kind. By minimizing risk and expenditure for the producer, all of these arrangements are also designed ultimately to maximize extraction of the surplus value of labour from workers.

At all sites, exploitation of labour was legitimated through a variety of discursive practices, often involving identity. In both Nazirartek and Dublar Char, these centered on the invocation of a binary insider/outsider definition (locals versus foreigners), whereas at Daspara, this distinction was inverted, with female extended family members and neighbours of dangy owners participating in fish drying activities, in part, out of a sense of communal identity and the obligations which this entailed. However, for Daspara's women fish workers, the decision to participate in the labour force was consensual, and influenced by the opportunity to earn discretionary income and thus, greater autonomy. Thus, they did not experience their exploitation in the same manner as the Rohingya of Nazirartek or the dhulabanga of Dublar Char. The status of the former group as highly vulnerable and impoverished outsiders forced them to work at any available opportunity, out of an urgent economic compulsion, whilst the latter group did so under the threat of physical force. These different sets of conditions and their attendant labour relations can be understood to have resulted in markedly different subjective wellbeing outcomes for the workers involved; broadly positive overall in the former instance, and strongly negative in the latter two.

10.5.2 Revisiting Wellbeing in Small-scale Fisheries Value Chains

This chapter presents empirical findings on the livelihoods and identity of labour employed in dried fish production in Bangladesh. Wellbeing - conceived of in terms of overlapping material, subjective and relational spheres - provides a powerful integrative framework for addressing these issues. The adoption of a value chain approach in defining the scope of the research complemented an emphasis on wellbeing by decentering fishers (the usual focus in fisheries research) in the analysis. In doing so, attention was directed toward the largely 'invisible' women and men labourers engaged in producing dried fish; itself a largely 'invisible' product, despite a large proportion of marine and freshwater landings in Bangladesh and many other Asian and African countries being processed in this way (e.g. Hortle 2007; Ruddle and Ishige 2010; Gordon et al. 2011).

Although the 'value' in value chains is usually conceived of in purely economic terms, in the context of this book's analytical framework and empirical evidence presented in this chapter, there is an obvious link to be drawn to a more broadly defined range of values embedded within the networks of relationships, interactions and exchange that constitute small-scale fisheries value chains. Linking to the social wellbeing framework, the multidimensional values associated with fisheries value chains span the material (e.g. the nutritional value of fish to which processing and distribution facilitates consumer access), the subjective (e.g. feelings of pride or associations of shame linked to membership of hereditary fishing and fish trading communities), and the relational (e.g. values reproduced through discourses around gender and identity, which shape the terms under which women and men engage in, or are excluded from, employment in different value chain segments).

Approaches that emphasize wellbeing and value chains are also highly compatible with those which foreground political economic analysis, because of the attention to relationships and materiality which both demand. In fact, many of the fundamental questions to be addressed when attempting to understand the wellbeing of actors in value chains are the same as Henry Bernstein's 'four key questions of political economy': "who owns what?", "who does what?", "who gets what?", and "what do they do with it?" (Bernstein 2010, p22). Making this agenda more explicitly wellbeing oriented simply entails adding a fifth question; "how do they experience this?" Answering this final question requires paying attention to the intersection of economic and power relations with interpersonal social relations and cultural and discursive practices. Linking together the material, subjective and relational in this way provides a broad, nuanced frame of analysis, capable of capturing and accounting for some of the complexities of social life as experienced by actors in small-scale fisheries or, for that matter, in any other social system.

However, as the findings presented here indicate, turning attention away from fishers themselves and redirecting it toward the labour employed by fishers and fish driers has potential to upset the "notions of fairness, share systems, kinship connections, locally adapted legal systems, shared attachment to place and profession, and subjectivities which draw these elements together" commonly espoused with reference to fishing communities (this volume, p. x). Instead, we see that these institutions and identities, whilst important components of fisher wellbeing, may also be implicated in relations of dominance over and exploitation of subordinate groups, both external and integral to fishing communities. This implies the need for a high degree of precision

and rigour in assessments of wellbeing in small-scale fisheries, particularly where targeted at the level of community, the concept of which has itself long been critiqued (e.g. Stacey 1969). These findings also underline the need to recognise that wellbeing can have a dark side; that one group or person's wellbeing is sometimes achieved at the expense of another's.

Acknowledgements

This chapter is a contribution to the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH). The authors wish to thank Mr. Mofizur Rahman for his contributions to the fieldwork and preparation of Figure 2, and Ms. Naveen Abedin for her assistance with preparing Figure 1. They are also very grateful to Dr. Thérèse Blanchet for taking time to read an earlier draft.

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