

Monograph

# Women Fish Vendors in Mumbai: A Study Report



Shuddhawati Peke



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**International Collective in Support of Fishworkers**

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### **Women Fish Vendors in Mumbai: A Study Report**

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# Contents

Acronyms and Abbreviations.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vii
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Section 1: About the Study.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Section 2: The <i>Kolis</i> of Mumbai .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Section 3: Structured Markets .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Section 4: Unstructured Markets.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Section 5: Fisheries Organizations.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Section 6: Conclusion .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Table 1: Classification of Markets and List of Landing Centres Visited for the Study.....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Fig 1: Important Fish Markets in Greater Mumbai.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Fig 2: Main Landing Centres in Greater Mumbai.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Endnotes .....</b>	<b>56</b>



## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

BEST	Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BMC	Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation
CIFE	Central Institute of Fisheries Education
CMFRI	Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute
CRZ	coastal regulation zone
EIA	environment impact assessment
FSI	floor space index
ICSF	International Collective in Support of Fishworkers
JNNURM	Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission
MBKMMVS	Marol Bazar Koli Mahila Mase Vikreta Sanstha
MCGM	Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai
MPCB	Maharashtra Pollution Control Board
MHADA	Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority
MMKS	Maharashtra Macchimar Kruti Samitee
MMRDA	Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority
MMMVS	Maharashtra Macchimar Mase Vikreta Sangha
MPEDA	Marine Products Export Development Authority
NEERI	National Environmental Engineering Research Institute
NIPFP	National Institute of Public Finance and Policy
NCDC	National Co-operative Development Corporation
NCP	Nationalist Congress Party
NFDB	National Fisheries Development Board
NFF	National Fishworkers' Forum
RTI	Right to Information Act
TISS	Tata Institute of Social Sciences

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# Women Fish Vendors in Mumbai: A Study Report

## INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in 1993, the Women in Fisheries programme of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) has been highlighting the vital role of women in fisheries. This study, “Women Fish Vendors in Mumbai”, aims to provide insights into the challenges faced by women fish vendors in the city of Mumbai (formerly Bombay).

Government development programmes and policies in fisheries are focused on men and their issues (Joseph C., year unknown), though, worldwide, women dominate the post-harvest sector in artisanal fisheries and are involved, to varying degrees, in pre-harvest and harvest activities. Women are involved throughout the marketing chain—from the landing of fish at the harbour to the vending of fish in markets (Mohite S., 2010). With the growing industrialization in fisheries, they have also become an important source of cheap labour in the fish-processing industry. Yet there is little appreciation of the role of women in fisheries.

Traditionally, women have been entrusted with the roles of housekeeping, reproductive activities, caregiving, maintaining social cohesion in the community, and supplementing the family’s income by working inside or outside fisheries. However, their work is rarely seen as productive and its value is discounted.

In India, women form 48.1 per cent of the total fisherfolk population (CMFRI, 2010). Making and mending nets, preparing hooks-and-line, and arranging labour, money and food for the men’s sea trips are considered as women’s work. Women are also involved in fish harvesting, to some extent. In Maharashtra, for example, women harvest shellfish like *kolim* (mysids), oysters and mussels at low tide in

intertidal or nearshore waters. Collection is done by hand or by using simple gears. In the State of Tamil Nadu, women collect seaweed and crabs (Rajagopalan R., 2008). In Andhra Pradesh, women and children from the *shoe-dhoni* community collect shellfish to supplement the family income (Salagrama V., 1990). Women play important and varied roles in the post-harvest sector. They work as auctioneers, traders, vendors, suppliers to hotels, processors and wage labourers in export companies. Of the marine fisherfolk, 23.4 per cent are engaged in fishing-related activities. Within this cohort, 36.5 per cent are engaged in marketing of fish, 32.6 per cent work as labour and 14.2 per cent are engaged in making and repairing nets (CMFRI, 2010).

Unfortunately, marketing in fisheries is hampered by a lack of coherent policies, price structures and outlets in domestic and export markets (Mohite S., 2010). This important, albeit weak, component of fisheries is dominated by women; 81.8 per cent of fisherfolk engaged in marketing are women, according to the CMFRI marine census of 2010.

A lack of women's participation in decision-making bodies within communities, fisheries organizations and government has resulted in a general neglect of their interests. This has led to a constant demand by women's-rights activists and organizations to address market-related issues of women vendors. Towards this end, a need to better understand these issues was recognized at the workshop on "Enhancing Women's Role in Fisheries" that was organized by ICSF in 2010. This study hopes to fill some of the gaps in understanding the issue of women in fisheries.

The study is based in Mumbai, a large metropolitan city in the state of Maharashtra in India, which has the largest number of women fish vendors in an urban area in the country. Maharashtra also boasts of the largest number of women in fish marketing (45,971; 20.6 per cent of women in fisheries) followed by Andhra Pradesh (39,324; 17.6 per cent) and Tamil Nadu (37,440; 16.8 per cent) (CMFRI, 2010). Keeping in mind the significance of the post-harvest sector for women, this study, "Women Fish Vendors in Mumbai", focuses on the challenges faced by women engaged in vending and marketing fish.

The study report is divided into the following sections: Introduction; Research Methodology; History and Background of the *koli* fishing community. They are followed by case studies of two markets and a discussion of issues faced by women vendors at these markets. There is also a case study of door-to-door vendors and a discussion of their issues. The report concludes with an overview of various organizations that work with the vendors.

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## **SECTION 1**

### **ABOUT THE STUDY**

#### **RESEARCH CONCERN**

In an era of global markets and modernization, like other communities, artisanal fishing communities too have had to deal with rapid changes. Within these communities, women are particularly threatened by changing roles and spaces in fisheries. In this context, what are the challenges faced by women vendors in fish markets in Mumbai?

#### **OBJECTIVES**

1. to study existing structured or formal, government-managed markets and unstructured or informal markets, street vendors and mobile markets ;
2. to document challenges faced by women fish vendors in an urban area, namely, Mumbai; and
3. to study the role of government and fisheries organizations and their policies in relation to women fish vendors.

#### **STUDY SITE AND DURATION**

The five-month long study was divided into a one-month literature review, followed by four months of qualitative data collection. This included several market visits in Greater Mumbai.

A total of 12 (nine formal and three informal) markets were visited in the two districts that comprise Greater Mumbai, namely, Mumbai City and Mumbai Suburban. The formal markets visited were Adamji Peerbhoy Mandai in Dhobi Talao, Marol Dry Fish Weekly Market in Andheri, Veer Savarkar Mandai in Dadar, Fort Mandai in Fort, Gawade Market in Worli, Wakola Market in Wakola, Kamathipura Market in Kamathipura, Prabhadevi Mandai in Prabhadevi, and Gopitank Market in Matunga. Of these, two were selected for in-depth analysis—Peerbhoy Mandai in south Mumbai (city district) and Marol Market in the north, falling in the suburban district. The three informal markets visited were Ganesh Nagar Market in Wadala, the Pikale Market in Mahim, and the Versova Market in Versova. Two case studies—of a vendor in an informal market and of a door-to-door vendor—were also undertaken to understand the challenges faced by them.

It should be noted that fish markets were considered as structured (formal) or unstructured (informal), based on their infrastructure and level of organization. Unstructured markets typically do not have even basic infrastructure and can be further classified into forced and natural markets. The former are where women have been pushed out of the market into the street due to development forces. Natural markets are those that are not organized, and spring up near residential complexes or on busy streets.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **STUDY DESIGN AND TOOLS**

The first month focused on a review of literature on women in fisheries, in general, and women fish vendors, in particular, to gain an understanding of the issues faced by women. Published reports, news clippings, books and information from the Internet provided statistical data and information on policies and schemes.

This served to inform the research design. The study was designed around interviews and group discussions with stakeholders. The tools used were refined in the field. It was decided that a qualitative and exploratory approach would best suit this study, instead of a rapid appraisal of many markets.

Observations and interviews with key persons were an important part of data collection. Fifteen women vendors, six leaders of trade unions, three members and office bearers of co-operative societies, including women's co-operatives, three market-specific organizations, one political leader and two government officials were interviewed, and discussions were held to gain a varied perspective. Visits to the landing centre at Bhaucha Dhakka (also known as New Ferry Wharf), drying yards in Arnala village, the solar dryer pilot project in Palghar and a *koliwada* were scheduled to get a holistic understanding of the women vendors' community. Knowledge of schemes for fisherwomen was obtained through the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) office and the Fisheries Department. Field observations and informal interaction with community members in the Worli, Versova and Cuffe Parade *koliwad*s in Mumbai provided a glimpse of the daily life of fisherfolk.

### **DATA COLLECTION TOOLS**

Checklists were used for the in-depth interviews with the women vendors and key informants. The initial checklist was revised at all phases in data collection to accommodate the concerns of vendors so as to get information on specific

challenges they face. Rather than structured questions, informal interactions with women vendors were found to be more fruitful. Checklists were used to carry out participant observation in fish markets. All the interviews were recorded in Marathi and translated into English.

Secondary data was obtained from local organizations, government sources, newspaper clippings, published reports and studies. Statistical data and information on policies, schemes and regulations of the government were accessed online.

## **STAKEHOLDERS**

The stakeholders identified were women vendors, women market committee members and women processors<sup>1</sup>, along with key resource persons such as women fishworker leaders from the Maharashtra Macchimar Kruti Samitee (MMKS), chairpersons of women co-operatives and fisheries co-operatives. After the data collection phase, the study was discussed with various stakeholders through a community meeting arranged at Mahim in Mumbai. The researcher's gender, familiarity with the language (Marathi), and background knowledge of women in fisheries helped in getting rich data through formal and informal interactions with stakeholders.

## **FIELD WORK**

The second month of the study was spent in understanding the current policy scenario in terms of fishing rules, regulations affecting fisherfolk, development plans of Mumbai and housing policies. In addition, the structure and functioning of the *koliwada* and organizations working with women vendors were looked at. This helped build a contextual understanding of women vendors' operations.

In the third and fourth month, field visits to markets were undertaken. For the first visit to each of the structured markets, a MMKS member accompanied the researcher to facilitate introductions. After discussions with MMKS leaders, two formal markets – Adamji Peerbhoy Mandai in South Mumbai's Dhobi Talao area and Marol market in North Mumbai – were selected for the case studies.

Adamji Peerbhoy Mandai has been reconstructed by a government body, the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA). It is located in a prime area and is one of the oldest markets in the city. The market was chosen to study the issues involved in development/reconstruction of markets by a government body. The other market, Marol, is the largest dry-fish market in the State. It serves both wholesale and retail customers. Being a weekly market, it receives producers from neighbouring districts. The producers there are mostly

women. The exception are the producers from the State of Gujarat who sell dried Bombay Duck. Marol market gets traders and customers from remote districts as well as retail customers from Mumbai.

Since the study's focus was on artisanal workers engaged in sun drying and salting of fish, it was decided to include this dry-fish market in the study. These two markets were visited about eight times each, with each visit lasting for two to three hours. The remaining 10 markets were visited once or twice for specific, issue-based interviews and observations on topics such as illegal licences, negotiations with the builder, and basic facilities at the market.

Two unstructured markets – one from Mahim and one from Wadala – were selected for the study of street vendors' issues. In addition, two case studies were done of door-to-door vendors, to understand the challenges faced by them. However, only one case study of each (a street vendor's market and that of a peripatetic vendor) are included in this report as representative of the issues faced by women in unstructured markets.

Several other places, such as the Arnala landing centre, the solar dryer project in Boisar, Palghar, and the Versova jetty were visited to understand the hurdles faced by the women processors and vendors. Since women vendors commute regularly from the neighbouring district of Thane to Mumbai, a train journey from Palghar to Virar was undertaken. Many women from Arnala come to Marol every week; so an effort was made to talk to them as well.

An assessment of the role played by government bodies and other organizations was also carried out on the basis of the field data. Finally, a community meeting at Mahim was held, where 31 men and women from the fishing community, activists, and civil-society members gathered for a discussion of the study. The meeting also brought on board the Central Institute of Fisheries Education (CIFE) to share information with the women on training facilities provided by CIFE. This was greatly welcomed by the women.

## **ANALYSIS AND REPORT**

Field notes and secondary data from various resources were compiled and subdivided into major categories, and themes were identified. Report writing was a month-long process.

## SECTION 2

### THE *KOLIS* OF MUMBAI

#### **HISTORY**

In Maharashtra, fishing is mostly done by a large ethnic group known as *kolis*. The term '*koli*' generally refers to fisherfolk but this group comprises other subcastes engaged in agriculture, labour, salt-pan work and other activities and are typically named after their occupation. The word '*koli*' means 'spider', and it is believed that the name originated from the similarity in action between a spider catching its prey and the fishers using nets to catch fish. Another interpretation is that '*kol*' means 'boat', hence the one who drives the boat is a '*koli*' (Mehtar C., 2012).

The *kolis* are one of the original inhabitants of what is now called Mumbai. They are also often referred to as 'kings of Mumbai' (*Mumbaiche Raj*) or 'sons of the soil' (*Bhumiputra*). Records indicate that, in 1138 C.E, when Pratap Bimba, king of Champaner, conquered the region, the *kolis* were already well-settled in the islands (Ranade S., 2008). In 1530, when the Portuguese wrested control of the Mumbai area from the Sultan of Ahmedabad, they named the region '*bom bahia*' ('good harbour'). At that time, Mumbai consisted of 400 households, comprising *kolis*, *bhandaris* and *pachkashis* (Madgaonkar G., 1863). 'Mumbai' (anglicized to 'Bombay' by the British) was then a cluster of seven islands<sup>2</sup>, all occupied by fisherfolk. Sir Gerald Angier, the second Governor of Bombay, embarked on a programme of reclamation of these small islands. The present-day city is a union of these fishing villages.

In independent India, States were divided on linguistic grounds, leading to a political movement to make Bombay the capital of the newly formed Marathi<sup>3</sup>-dominated State of Maharashtra. This was supported by many, such as the fisher leader and then mayor of Bombay, Babasaheb Worlikar, who lobbied with the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, to test who would stay if the government issued an order to vacate Bombay. Worlikar believed that only the natives of the city, that is, the fishers, salt-pan workers and so on, would remain, while the rest would abandon the city. In more recent times, a parochial politics has led to the city being renamed from a colonial 'Bombay' to 'Mumbai', after the patron goddess of fishers, Mumba Devi. This parochial attitude surfaces frequently in the State's politics; fisherfolk, for one, are upset that while they, the 'sons of the soil', are being marginalized, migrants from other parts of the country are muscling in on their traditional livelihood. This anti-outsider rhetoric is a common theme in Maharashtra State politics.



## IDENTITY

There are around 1,040 sub-castes of the larger mother tribe of *kolis* in India (Mehar C., 2012). These castes are divided based on their occupations, location, language, etc. For example, water carriers are *pankolis*, *kolis* residing on the banks of Vaiterna (a river in Maharashtra) are called *vaittee kolis*; net (*mag*) draggers are *mangela kolis*; and *kolis* residing in mountainous regions are *dongar kolis*. One of the few ethnographic studies on *kolis*, “Sonkolis of Bombay” by Vijaya Punekar, provides detailed observations of the Sonkolis’ culture and the impact of globalization on the community. Some of these castes (*Mahadev kolis*, *Dongar kolis*, *Malhar kolis*, *Tokare kolis* and *Dhor kolis*) are included in the Scheduled Tribes of India list, while other *kolis* (*Mangela koli*, *Gabit koli*, etc.) are included in the Other Backward Classes list. These lists refer to the government’s affirmative-action policies under which reservation of seats in education, government jobs and access to subsidized health insurance is granted for some historically marginalized communities. The extent of reservation varies between these groups.

Political discourse on *kolis* has focused on claims made by some *kolis* to attain Scheduled Tribe status to gain greater access to various government schemes. In 1994, the Maharashtra government issued an order requiring *kolis* to get their caste status validated in an attempt to reduce misuse of the affirmative-action policies of the government. This move has not gone down well with the *koli* groups. The National Association of Fishermen is fighting the government’s order.

## CULTURE AND BELIEFS

Almost 85 per cent of fisherfolk families are Hindus and 16 per cent of the fisher families either belong to a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe in Maharashtra (CMFRI, 2010). In his study on *kolis* of Worli, Ranade describes how goddess worship predominates in this caste. There are rituals conducted before starting out to sea, which involves decorating the idol with flowers and interpreting the fall of flowers to indicate a good or bad catch or the type of weather. Ranade points out that, over the years, with the younger generation moving away from fishing, the worship of tribal goddesses such as Ekvira and Golphadevi has declined, while the worship of mainstream Hindu gods, like Maruti and Shiva, has become popular. Some *koli* groups have converted to Christianity.

*Koli* music and dance are unique and popular in the cultural programmes in the State. Their traditional dress is also distinctive. It comprises of a *rumal*<sup>4</sup>, *pairan*<sup>5</sup>

and *topi*<sup>6</sup> for men and for the women, a 12-foot long sari worn in inimitable style (*lugada*), *suraka*<sup>7</sup> and lots of flowers in the hair. These traditional outfits are being replaced by the ubiquitous trouser and shirt and six-yard saris. This loss of distinct identity due to assimilation into the mainstream Hindu identity has been termed 'Sanskritization' by the sociologist, M N Srinivas, known for his work on caste systems and social stratification.

## **KOLIWADA AND POPULATION**

In terms of fisherfolk population, Maharashtra is the fifth most-populous State (3,86,259), after Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Odisha (formerly Orissa) and Andhra Pradesh. It has 720 km of coastline across five coastal districts, namely, Thane, Greater Mumbai, Ratnagiri, Raigad and Sindhudurga. Greater Mumbai, which is the study location, comes fourth in terms of fisherfolk population, with 40,953 people (CMFRI 2010). Being old settlements, the 30 *koliwad*s (fishing villages) in Greater Mumbai occupy what is considered prime real estate.

With the expanding urban sprawl, the natural resources of the Mumbai region, such as waterways and mangrove ecosystems, have been completely changed to reclaim land. This has obviously meant loss of access to land and resources for the fishers.

The land crunch in an expanding city has meant that *koliwad*s have become fair game for developers. The government classifies *koliwad*s as slums, which, therefore, are to be considered for redevelopment by the slum rehabilitation authority. In 2011, a new version of the notification regulating coastal development, that is, the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, was promulgated, which allows the no-development zone of 0-200m to be reduced by 100m for construction/reconstruction of houses of traditional coastal communities, including fishing communities, in CRZ III areas, that is, rural areas. Recently, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra declared that the floor space index (FSI) would be increased to two (from one) so as to facilitate redevelopment of *koliwad*s. This, the fishers suspect, was done to favour private developers rather than the fishing community.

With the future of fishing threatened by problems such as the pollution of coastal waters, the next generation is looking to move out of the sector. The educated few have turned to government employment, while other less fortunate *kols* are shifting to the unorganized labour sector, working as domestic help and construction workers.

## **DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM OF MUMBAI**

Mumbai, the State capital of Maharashtra, is also the economic capital of India. It is the largest coastal metropolis in the country as well as the most densely populated, with a population of 12.5 mn (Census of India, 2011). However, this is only the official resident population of the city and does not include the large daily workforce commuting into the city.

Planning for such a huge city is a tough ask. There are several administrative bodies that look after different aspects of the city's infrastructure and civic amenities: the Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority (MMRDA); the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA); the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST); and the country's largest corporation, the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), to name the major ones. MCGM is also known as the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). A 2006 survey by the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP) found that power distribution, public transport, public health and education are just a few of the responsibilities of BMC. The plethora of management work invested with the organization makes it one of the important bodies in the city's infrastructure management.

The focus of the government has been on promoting infrastructure projects to boost the city's economy but not on the quality of living for the poorest city dwellers. The poor are neither consulted nor involved in any way in the planning process.

During the election campaign of 2004, the Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh, spoke of making Mumbai a global metropolis like Shanghai. This vision of India's urban space dovetails with that of corporate-funded lobby groups and think tanks like Bombay First. Bombay First commissioned the global management consultant firm, McKinsey and Co., to produce a blueprint for Mumbai's development. McKinsey's report envisions increasing economic growth, reducing slum population from 60 to 10 per cent, and improving infrastructure.

"Mumbai: City Development Plan – An Appraisal Report, 2006" by NIPFP points out that the BMC's City Development Plan (a requirement to receive funds from the Central government under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission or JNNURM) has drawn liberally from the McKinsey report with a focus on tourism and redevelopment through the relaxation of coastal norms (CRZ Rules) and FSI standards. Other focal points include better housing, infrastructure and transport systems. The appraisal report also notes

that the preparation of the Plan seems to depend mostly on the McKinsey report, with little note being taken of the State government's own Task Force, charged with preparing an action plan for the city's development. It also mentions that the involvement of BMC and other stakeholders in formulating the Plan is not perceptible.

The Master Plan (separate from the city development plan) for the city dates to 1974. Though it was revised in 1984 and the revised version approved in 1994, it is yet to be implemented. A new Master Plan is to be finalized by 2014 but is likely to be delayed by two years as it gets passed around from government agency to government agency. This long-delayed plan is based on 2001 data which, of course, is now obsolete.

Meanwhile, newer policies like the Rs 50,000 crore (US\$ 9,122.91-mn) JNNURM, launched in December 2005 for a period of seven years, have pumped money into cities with the aim of making them more efficient and equitable. JNNURM requires States and cities to implement reforms to their regulatory frameworks to integrate the poor into the service delivery system, and make the service delivery system accountable, transparent and efficient. The first phase of JNNURM targets 60 cities with a population of over one mn and 20 cities of religious and tourism importance, and focuses on improving infrastructure and civic amenities, albeit with a rider of ensuring basic services for the poor, including security of tenure. Data from the MMRDA website indicates that among the 12 cities of Maharashtra that are included under the scheme, Mumbai has been the biggest beneficiary, with about Rs 3037.14 crore (US\$ 554.02 mn), upto 2012.

## **FISHERFOLK AND URBANIZATION**

The *kolis* have a hoary relationship with nature. Reminiscing, the fisherwomen noted that as children, they would travel by boat to the different islands for fishing. Back then, fish was abundant. Pointing to places near the Mithi River in Mahim, they said that there were creeks here that supported mangroves. Women in small groups would catch shellfish easily. No one went hungry in those days, they added. All this changed post-1947, with the advent of greater industrialization.

Yet, be it the colonial era or now, the original inhabitants of this region still do not get a say in the management and planning of the city. And in recent times, the *kolis* have struggled to keep their culture intact in the face of the pressures of modern development. Their settlements have been subsumed by the

urban sprawl of Mumbai, and it is an uphill battle to secure their space and livelihood. Government policies have continued to ignore their needs and have made little effort to integrate them into the mosaic of the city.

In 2012, the government eased the FSI restrictions in the *koliwada*. This was supposed to benefit fishers, but has aided builders who are looking to develop the coast. This is exemplified by what has taken place in the *koliwada* at Sion, which was demolished in May 2012 by BMC, accompanied by the police and a private builder. Media reports state that the 2000-strong community was roused to protest at this sudden attack on their dwelling. Media reports say that the claim of the government and the builder that the community had consented to the redevelopment plan was proved false through information obtained under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

The *kolis* are also threatened by many upcoming projects such as coastal roads, water pipelines and waterfront beautification, not to mention the problems caused by earlier projects like the Bandra-Worli sea link. The project developers of a waterfront beautification project claim, for example, that the *kolis* of Chimbai *koliwada* have been involved in the plans. However, there is a schism in the community over this project as it will deprive the *kolis* of their drying yards, space for beaching boats, etc. Their changed circumstances have led to the next generation of *kolis*, who have some amount of formal education, moving away from fisheries. Others have responded by abandoning their traditional livelihood sources to move into the unorganized sector.

## **FISHERWOMEN/FISH VENDORS IN THE URBAN CONTEXT**

Since women in fisheries have been bracketed as working in the post-harvest sector, they do not get represented during planning of fisheries, in landing-related or in mainstream fisheries planning. For example, the New Ferry Wharf landing centre is a major fish-buying centre for women fish vendors from Mumbai and is also a port for berthing some 300 boats from nearby districts. A new jetty at Uran Karanja in the neighbouring district of Raigad was approved by the State Fisheries Department without consulting the women who access fish from the boats from the Uran area, which function from the New Ferry Wharf. Once the new jetty is built, the women will lose access to fish overnight as the boats will anchor in their hometown.

The number of boatowners selling fish through the women is also decreasing. So women have to rely on the wholesale markets or landing centres, often moving from one market or centre to another, looking for fish. They are also threatened by the entry of middlemen (from outside the fishing community)

into vending, especially men from north Indian States like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (locally called *bhaiya lok*). There is no effort on the government's part to ensure the needs of these women are considered while planning nor is there any provision to ensure that women retain access to fish for marketing and processing.

Pollution of creeks and rivers has deprived the women of their supplementary income of fishing for crabs and shell fish. Women processors in Versova and Arnala pointed out that pollution and a premium on coastal space has meant reduced space for drying of fish, and inadequate water supply for them. The women also face competition from shops set up in malls, decreasing their customer flow. "Before the tsunami (of 2004), this business was quite good. Now pomfret costs Rs 800 (US\$ 14.59) per kg; it was one-tenth the price earlier. Incidents like the oil spill caused by the August 2010 collision of the container vessel *MSC Chitra* with the bulk carrier *Khalija-III* at the harbour entrance and the redevelopment of markets are pushing us into a corner," said a fish vendor leader. The collision caused 879 tonnes of oil to spill, affecting a large part of the shoreline, says an environment impact assessment (EIA) study on the oil spill prepared by the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) for the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB). The government advised the public not to eat fish caught within this area, which meant a huge loss for the fish vendors. The government announced it would compensate the loss of livelihood endured by the fishers and fish vendors. However, the compensation amounts have yet to be disbursed.

Women processors, such as those in Versova, who dry their fish naturally under the sun, face their own challenges. Clean water to wash fish is hard to find. In Versova, water is polluted and blackish in colour, affecting the quality of fish. Nowadays, less than 10 per cent of Versova women are in the business of drying fish. Kathewadi people from Gujarat who have settled in Versova are now drying fish on a large scale. They store the high-tide water in tank-like structures and use this water to wash fish. Customers complain of the foul smell but there is little option. In a few places, like Madh and Palghar districts, solar dryers have been tried out but they are expensive, and the women say that their local customers do not care for the quality of the solar-dried fish. One of the processors said, "The machine is very big and dries a lot of fish but it costs a lot. Plus, only one vendor can dry her fish at a time". She added that natural drying is better, but it involves problems.

Conflicting land-use demands add to the women's woes. Coastal areas near Mumbai are rapidly developing due to a growing urban population. Arnala, in

Thane district, is an example of areas where women are losing space for fish drying. The drying yards have been built up so women have the extra chore of carrying their fish to a common area designated by the fishery society.

Women fish vendors, though economically independent, are socially and politically weak. They are generally not recognized as fishworkers, leading to a neglect of their problems. Unlike in some other States, such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala, little attention has been paid to women fish vendors, and there are few schemes addressing their needs, like, for example, schemes for provision of ice boxes, transport facilities and credit.

## SECTION 3

### STRUCTURED MARKETS

#### **WOMEN FISH VENDORS**

Fisherwomen/*koli* women, unlike other vendors who migrated to the city of Mumbai for economic reasons, have been operating in fish markets for generations. In fact, in many places, they built the physical structures as well. They have a tradition of handing over the business from one generation to the next. Suresh Bhoir of MMKS, recalling the history of fish markets, said, “Since historical times, fish selling has been entrusted to the fisherwomen. Earlier, they used to sell in groups in busy areas, and, over time, they built their own markets with their money in an informal way.”

After Independence, around 1956, BMC took over these markets and began to maintain facilities at the market<sup>8</sup>. For this service, women had to pay a daily fee of 5 paise to the BMC-appointed *mukadam* (inspector) and were issued a daily pass. To formalize the market structure, BMC started to issue licences to vendors, bringing in a market tax system to pay for the maintenance and renovation costs. In the mid-1960s, the more savvy vendors and traders quickly came forward to obtain these licences. Fisherwomen refused licences as they considered themselves owners and founders of the markets. Their relation to the market was ancestral, and they did not understand the importance of a formal method, instead convincing themselves that the market was theirs, and that nobody could stop them from selling in the market. In addition, the women preferred paying the daily pass rather than Rs1,000 annually. Hence, not a single *koli* woman got a formal licence until 2006.

However, the women continued to function from markets. Things changed with the entry of the *bhaiya lok* into the fishing sector in the 1980s. These men used to work as labour for fisherwomen at landing centres, transporting fish from the auction site to the market. The women hired them for their muscle power and the fact that they were willing to work for low wages. By dint of working at auction sites and markets, the men learnt the business. Meanwhile, the women began to complain of instances of fish being stolen during transportation to the market, blaming the men for the theft. The *koli* women were convinced that the men were selling the fish in transit camps and slums at lower rates. Later, the men ventured into the auctions themselves, buying fish wholesale in groups of five or six. Until then, the *koli* women had no competition



in the retail business. The auction prices increased as men could afford to bid higher in groups, out-competing women bidding individually. The threat posed by the men grew, leading to an agitation or *andolan*. In 2004, Ramkrishna Keni, a women vendors' leader and a former worker of the Shiv Sena (a right-wing political party in Maharashtra with a strong parochial and xenophobic agenda) led the *Bhaiya Hatao Andolan* to push these north Indian men out of fish vending.

In 2005, another fish vendor trade union, the Maharashtra Macchimar Mase Vikreta Sangha, came to the forefront with *andolans* for getting licences issued to women vendors in BMC markets. BMC, while telling the women that issuing licences was not an option, contacted its local market officials and the market committees to identify vendors for the purpose of issuing licences. "The whole process was not transparent and so, many women were left out because in some cases the market committee members themselves excluded some names, and in other cases, BMC neglected verification of vendors. The proof BMC needed was a copy of the ration card and two passes, one from before 2000 and one from 2005. So women who were sitting in the market until 2000 (or for generations) but took a break after that or discontinued, did not have proof for post-2005 occupancy and so were left out of the licence process," explained Bhoir.

Another outcome of these *andolans* was that BMC invited vendors to develop their markets. For this, BMC asked them to provide a security deposit of Rs 10 crore (US\$ 1,824,244.68). The women, of course, did not have access to such sums. Notices (about this plan) were posted in the markets and a time period of six months was given in 2005, but nobody came forward and that move was dropped.

Later, in 2010, when questions were asked on deteriorating market conditions, BMC issued an order to repair the markets. But nothing happened on that front either. According to information obtained under the RTI Act, Rs 90,09,815.70 (US\$ 164,339.29) was sanctioned in 2010 for repair work at Peerbhoy Mandai at Dhobi Talao. Yet, as the case study on this market will show, the women are still waiting for basic facilities.

## **MARKET STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT**

Mumbai has 108 markets managed by BMC, of which 61 are fish markets. However, these are not necessarily exclusively for fish. BMC's market and garden department, located in Crawford Market, which was re-christened Mahatma Phule Mandai, governs the markets. The department is headed by the Assistant

Commissioner of Markets. There is a head supervisor for five to 10 markets, depending on the size of the markets. Each market is managed by a market inspector and a staff of two to four persons (an office assistant, a *mehtar*<sup>9</sup>, a peon and a cleaner). The market inspector's office is located in the market. BMC provides water supply, electricity and solid-waste management, for which it collects an annual fee from licence holders.

## **MARKET REDEVELOPMENT POLICY**

BMC came up with a market redevelopment policy in 2002, though it took three years to get the State government's approval. The policy also introduced the system of licences so that without a licence a person could not be considered as a beneficiary of the redevelopment project. Recently, BMC withdrew its 2002 policy but the new policy is still being finalized. People working with MMKS have heard that there is much debate over this new policy among corporators (BMC's elected representatives) and private developers who are lobbying hard with BMC to finalize the market policy, citing this as a reason for the delay in redevelopment of many markets.

Unfortunately, BMC is unwilling to share details of the new policy. As for the old policy, information on the same is available only through media reports. Since the policy has been withdrawn, official copies are unavailable. BMC is also reluctant to discuss the contents of either policy. The following information on the policies, therefore, is culled from media reports and discussions with fishworker leaders etc.

Under the old 2002 policy, prime-market properties for redevelopment could be assigned to developers without even calling for bids. A majority of 70 per cent of licencees of the markets could appoint a developer, and the civic body's role was limited to verification of consent given by the licencees. The market redevelopment was given a FSI ranging between 2.5 and 1.33, depending on the year it was built. The FSI had to be shared with the developer, with the sharing ratio between the civic body and the developer being 1:0.6 for markets in the island city and 1:1 in the suburbs, irrespective of the market price. The market occupants needed to have a BMC-issued licence to sell in the market.

In 2005, it was announced that the 138-year-old Crawford market would be redeveloped under the 2002 market policy. This created a stir among building conservationists, as well as developers. Crawford market, named after the first municipal commissioner, Arthur Crawford, is a well-known landmark in the city. This redevelopment project was given to a private

developer who was given an increased FSI of 4 to work with, through a proposal (sanctioned under the 2002 policy) passed in 2007. Civil society groups opposed this, alleging that private developers were profiting from public land and that the heritage value of the market was being ignored.

Crawford market's redevelopment plan provided for accommodating all the traders using the market, reserving a small ratio of the space for BMC, and for selling off the largest chunk at market value. In an article by Smruti Koppikar in *Outlook* magazine, Shailesh Gandhi, an RTI activist, commented on the imbalance between what the developer and the State would make; at least Rs 1000 crore (US\$ 182,412, 869.14) and just Rs 42 crore (US\$ 7,662,282.43), respectively. In addition, this would pave the way for the redevelopment of other markets. Gandhi further noted that the developer (backed by politicians) would get Rs 6000 crore (US\$ 1,095,111,222.8) of public money. The intense civil society pressure against the redevelopment of the Crawford market forced the then Municipal Commissioner, Subodh Kumar, to retract the redevelopment plan for Crawford and 17 other markets. In 2010, BMC came out with a new plan for 38 markets, with the private developer pocketing 60 per cent of the profits and BMC getting the rest. For the 18 markets in the city, the FSI was fixed between 1.33 and 2, depending on the age of the market, and for the remaining markets (in the suburbs), the FSI was fixed at 1. In the city markets, the builder would get 60 per cent of the shops while in the suburban ones, the builder and BMC would get equal shares.

## **WOMEN FISH VENDORS AND REDEVELOPMENT BY THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

According to a 2012 study by the Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies, New Delhi, fisherfolk in Juhu Moragaon have been demanding that market redevelopment should take place under the new policy, utilizing funds available through the JNNURM, or through the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) for developing post-harvest infrastructure.

For the most part, women fish vendors have welcomed the redevelopment of markets by the private sector since they offer a better deal, compared to the potential deal with BMC. "BMC met with our market committees and told us that since the markets are for public use and they are short of funds, we should deposit Rs 10 crore (US\$ 1,823,532.00) from each market. When we protested that we don't have that kind of money, they said they couldn't then redevelop the market and that's how the private sector got in," said Ujjwala Patil of MMKS.

The private developers offered a better deal—both to BMC and to the vendors. For a share in the built-up space (made possible by increasing the FSI), the builders offered BMC a redeveloped market with a share in the built-up area for BMC use. The vendors were to receive a monthly compensation while work on the market was ongoing, plus Rs 6000 (US\$ 109.34) in the first year and Rs 12,000 (US\$ 218.68) in the second year for each licensed vendor, and a corpus fund to cover maintenance charges for the restrooms, water supply and so on. The women were—and still are—quite taken up with this offer, which is far better than any that would be forthcoming from a government-funded development. Trija Killekar, chairperson of Mumbai Zilha Matsya Vikreta Mahila Sahakari Sanstha, also expressed concern that if redevelopment was a wholly government affair, there could be considerable delays. Women vendors may even prefer redevelopment by the private sector, in lieu of obtaining funds from JNNURM or NFDB, as it would not involve a corpus fund or compensation until the market gets built.

## CONCERNS

However, women fish vendors also have some serious reservations about market redevelopment by the private sector, based on the way such redevelopment is playing out.

Wakola Mandai in suburban Mumbai, redeveloped by Sangram Builders, is the first market developed under this model. The redesigned market will provide facilities such as lighting, air conditioning, parking space, restrooms, a small storage space under the counter, and water supply. It is shortly to be inaugurated. An activist familiar with the situation in this market, however, says, “Many women and market committee leaders are aligned with the builders. They ensured that the women consented to the builder’s plans. This is easy since most of the women are illiterate and are rarely involved in the complex processes of redevelopment.” Once the market becomes operational, other issues may come to the fore.

In other cases too, individuals representing the women vendors, such as local leaders and heads of women’s co-operatives, are rumoured to have brokered deals with the builders, shortchanging vendors in the process. In Gawade market in Worli, for example, the women were promised compensation during the redevelopment process. Here, Cosmos Developers were brought in by the market committee on the understanding that if the developer pays the women Rs 10,000 (US\$ 182.22) per month for the first year and Rs 12,000 (US\$ 218.68) per month the second year, then the women would consent to the redevelopment plan. The developer would also provide a corpus fund and alternate vending space for

those interested. “We need the money, what with the slump in business and the loans we have taken,” said Bharati Worlikar, a vendor at Gawade market. The promises have not been met, however, and the mediator is said to have pocketed half the compensation money. He had also offered to work his political connections and get licences for the women who were left out, but nothing has yet materialized. There is also talk of a scam over the Mediclaim (medical insurance) policy.

In Matunga’s Gopitank market, the women had to watch out for the men taking unilateral decisions. “There used to be a union of all vendors earlier, in which there were 308 women. Despite outnumbering the men, a unilateral decision was taken by the men to let a private player, Omkar Developers, redevelop the market. Luckily, since my husband too was a union member, we got to hear about this and were able to protest and stop the plan,” explained Malan Dhone, a leader of women vendors of Gopitank market.

In the context of redevelopment of markets, the issue of licences becomes very important. For example, Fort Mandai, which is in the oldest heritage part of Mumbai, has 102 licensed women. The market is sectioned by product—the fish stalls are near the entrance, while the meat stalls are further inside. Kalpana Patil, chair of the yet-to-be-named local market organization, says illegal licences have been issued. “See here—these empty boxes are selling fish,” she says sarcastically, pointing out that stalls have empty boxes with a few fish placed atop for show. She adds that though this is a wet-fish market, licences have been given for selling dry fish. “Ten licences have been given to Muslim men though we women have been using this space for the last 75 years. In spite of having licences, they do not sell fish here. We never see them,” said Patil. “In 2006, when there were discussions between the vendors’ association of the market and the government (BMC) about licences, these 10 names were not there. Now suddenly their names are in the list of licensed vendors. It is obvious some subterfuge took place,” she alleges.

While social activists and the media are busy discussing the economic implications of the various market policies, more practical details are preying on the vendors’ minds. While the licensed vendors are concerned about how much money the redevelopment will bring them, those without licences are more fundamentally concerned about whether they will get their space in the market once it is redeveloped. The increased uncertainty of their future has led to much insecurity among the women.

It is also feared that after the redevelopment, people residing in the towers above the markets will object to fish markets, especially if such residential spaces

are occupied vegetarian communities like Jains and Gujaratis. “In Colaba (an upmarket locality in south Mumbai), we had an argument with a Gujarati living in the tower near the fish market who complained to BMC that a crow had dropped some fish waste outside his window. So he wanted the market to be moved,” said Sagar Killekar, chairman of the *macchimar* (fishers) cell of the right-wing political party, BJP.

Two case studies are provided below to illustrate some of the issues discussed above: one retail wet-fish market (Dhobi Talao) and one wholesale and retail dry-fish market (Marol). Both are managed and developed by BMC. A case study of a market redeveloped through a private developer was not undertaken as the only market that has so far been redeveloped under this model (Wakola Mandai in suburban Mumbai) is yet to become operational.

### **CASE STUDY:**

#### **PEERBHOY MANDAI, DHOBI TALAO**

“Oh! So you have come to understand the problems of this market. This market itself is a problem.” This sarcastic comment from a male vendor launched my exploration of the market in Dhobi Talao.

### **HISTORY**

Named after Adamji Peerbhoy, the first sheriff of Mumbai and a philanthropist, the market is situated in one of the old areas of the city. The heritage buildings that abound in the area are dilapidated, making development here a priority for BMC. The market has already been developed several times, say the vendors, including by the MHADA some years ago. The market’s origins are not known as there is little in the way of written records. Vendors in the market talk of a rosy past when the market was huge, with ample space for each vendor. Some of the women claimed that fish vendors held sway in those days.

### **THE MARKET**

Peerbhoy Mandai, located in a built-up area, is accessible only by a narrow lane, making it easy to miss. In addition to fish, the market also sells vegetables and meat. The vegetable vendors have stalls near the market entrance. Further inside are the fish vendors and the meat vendors, who are provided with storage and other facilities, including a platform at a convenient height. Traditionally, the fish vendors in Peerbhoy market set up shop only in the mornings, though the vegetable and meat vendors function throughout the day. The market functions all through the year.

The market has only one water tap and one restroom. It leaves much to be desired in terms of hygiene. The fish vendors complain that the platform (from which they sell) is crowded. While there is a separate stall for the ice trader, it is unused and has become a garbage dump. The women buy ice from ice vendors on bicycles. Other considerations such as the lack of parking facilities for customers have also impacted all the vendors, not just the fish vendors. The number of meat and vegetables shops has dwindled to a handful.

The market has a vendors' association dominated by men. Only two women are members but they have stopped coming to the market and no effort has been made to replace them. The women do not have their own organization.

## **WOMEN FISH VENDORS**

According to the market inspector's records, there are 43 fish vendors and 95 other vendors. The women claim that in earlier (better) days, there were 195 women in the market, vending fish. About 35 of the fish vendors come regularly to the market; some come thrice a week, others only on days when people are unlikely to take vows to be vegetarian, or when they (the vendors) are able to source their preferred fish. All of them, except for six, are Mangela *kolis*.

Four women fish vendors were interviewed. Their concerns varied, depending on factors such as age and their licence status. The frequency of market days for the women is not fixed. Parwati Tandel, a 70-year-old fish vendor, for instance, comes to the market if she has money in hand to buy fish and if she can afford to buy the fish at her favourite source—Sassoon Dock. This is important, since, like most fish vendors, she is unable to get credit to buy fish. On days when the fish price is beyond her range, she stays at home. Other considerations such as the religious and dietary habits of her customers also play a role in deciding when she sits in the market.

The women commute from different areas in and around Mumbai. Two women come from Vashi and Navi Mumbai and several are from Cuffe Parade. Five women come from Uran in the neighbouring district of Raigad. Veena, in her late thirties, is one of them. Uran, a small fishing town, is connected to Mumbai by regular ferry services, which is mainly used by daily commuters. Veena's daily routine begins at 5 a.m. when she catches the ferry, buys fish at the other end and then heads to the market. She leaves back for home around 1:30 pm. This does not leave time for breakfast. At the most she manages to get some puri bhaji and tea at Bhaucha Dhakka and maybe another tea and snack later in the day. She gets to eat a proper meal only on reaching home. Even without food, the commute is expensive—Rs 120 (US\$ 2.19) daily. Kusum, a prawn vendor in

her late forties, stays in the market for even longer. Leaving home by 5 a.m. she returns only at around 4 p.m. and so does not get to eat till then. Often she is the last vendor to leave the market.

Veena points out that though money was allocated for providing amenities at the market, this has not been spent properly. “We have to buy water for drinking and for washing our fish, we have to pay to get the floors cleaned, and for security. What is the BMC doing?” said an irate Veena. She said that though she is unlicensed, her mother has a licence and she pays Rs 600 (US\$ 10.93) annually to the BMC.

Among the 35 regular fish vendors only 25 have licences. Others with licences have stopped coming to the market because of age, an improvement in their family’s economic conditions, health or because the next generation is uninterested in the job. Women who don’t have licences sit on the edge of the market where there is no roof or occupy the spaces left vacant by the 18 licence holders who have stopped coming to the market. Parwati Tandel has been coming to the market for five decades but remains unlicensed. Some years ago she had moved to her village to take care of her ailing husband. Six years later when she returned to the city and to the market, she found to her consternation that the rules had changed. Without a licence, she could not get a place to sit within the market though she had been an occupant for many years and had proof of occupancy (passes were issued in the 1950s). She now occupies the spot of one of the licensed women who has stopped selling fish due to an improved economic status. “I have four daughters and two daughter-in-laws who also sell fish. At least I should get my place in the market, even if the rest of my family does not,” she said.

There is conflict between people living next to the market and the vendors over extending the roof. The local residents have been blocking efforts to get the BMC to extend the roof because small changes have to be made in the walls of adjoining building to accommodate the extension. The lack of roof means that fish spoils from being in the sun, or that crows may drop guano on people or on the fish. The fish vendors say that their stalls used to be near the market entrance earlier, but now they are at the back. This has reduced the customer flow as many customers do not know that the market has fish stalls.

Though the full strength of fish vendors do not make continuous use of the market, the vendors say the space per person has reduced. “We have space for just one *khoka* (square) now. Why can’t the market inspector visit and assess the conditions?” asked Kusum, who says her family has been vending in this market for three generations.



The women are facing various problems not only in terms of market facilities but also transferable rights, transport costs, access to fish, corruption, organization, development of markets, lack of participation in market bodies, licences, conflicts over space, and neglect by BMC authorities. Some of the women felt that the market functioning has been badly affected by corruption among some of the stakeholders, even those who profess to be working for the vendors' welfare. The women have become cynical about the process. Others were clueless about the politics of the market.

### **WOMEN PROCESSORS AND FISH VENDORS: CASE STUDY OF MAROL MARKET**

Many women are engaged in processing fish at a small scale. To get an understanding of the issues and concerns of small-scale women processors who also vend fish, a case study of the Marol dry-fish market was undertaken.

Marol is a weekly market where traders from all over Maharashtra and retail customers from nearby areas of Mumbai come to purchase dry fish. It is the largest dry-fish market in the State and one of the oldest markets in the Mumbai suburban area. Traders from the neighbouring State of Gujarat come to Marol to sell dry fish in bulk, specifically Bombay Duck (or *bombil*), which is the major product handled at Marol. Other species like anchovy and shrimp are sold as well. Situated in north Mumbai's Marol *taluk*<sup>10</sup>, the market has women from Mumbai's *koliwad*s and nearby fishing villages selling their produce. The fish vendors are women, while the Gujarati traders and others from the rest of Maharashtra are usually men.

### **HISTORY**

"The market is 150 years old, making it one of the oldest in the city suburbs. It was there when women used bullock carts to bring their produce to the market. After Independence, BMC took over the market, developing and redeveloping it a few times", said Rajashree Bhanji, chair of the Marol Bazar Koli Mahila Mase Vikreta Sanstha (MBKMMVS).

In the 1960s, BMC had constructed a market with a central pillar detailing the market's history, and arranged around this pillar were simple rectangular blocks of cement to sell from. The roof provided adequate protection and the market was airy and easily accessible. Trucks used to park outside the covered area. This, the women said, suited them fine. Then, for reasons best known to itself, in 1991, BMC demolished this structure. There was no redevelopment for 11 years, causing much discomfort to the women as they

performers had to vend in the open amid garbage. Facilities like water, toilets and lighting were absent, not to mention security against those who used the market as their drinking hangout.

Bhanji recalled how the deplorable conditions had spurred her to take the initiative. “We women from Versova would come here to sell fish. The market was filthy. You cannot imagine what we had to cope with during the monsoons. One monsoon, I realized that my Laxmi (the fish<sup>11</sup>) was getting washed away. All my hard work was for naught. All the women were suffering as well. That is when I decided to take matters into my hands,” she said.

Through the many *mahila mandals* (women’s groups), which until then had focused on managing religious festivities in Versova, the women organized themselves and began going on *morchas* (marches) and *dharnas* (sit-ins) against BMC. They also began writing to BMC about improving the market. “This was when I realized that some men and even women from our community were using us for their political agendas. With the help of well-wishers, we registered MBKMMVS in 2005. Since then, we have looked out for ourselves,” added Bhanji.

After continued pressure from the women vendor’s organization, BMC redeveloped the market. The women allege that there was no transparency in the redevelopment plan and that they suspect irregularities in accounts. The women also say they were not consulted during the redevelopment process.

MBKMMVS has been proactive in taking matters into their own hands to improve the facilities in the market. Thanks to it, the market now has restrooms for men and women, which are maintained by the organization. It also has set up a one room office for itself. One of the logistical issues that need to be solved is parking. Currently vehicles are parked in one corner of the market. The limited parking space, which is not clearly designated, causes a melee when traders and customers flock to the market. Each section of the market is assigned to women from an area such as Versova or Arnala.

## **THE RETAIL MARKET**

The retail market functions on from Friday afternoon (around 4 p.m.) to late night and again from Saturday early morning to about 9:30 p.m. Retailers are generally small-scale women vendors who either buy dried fish from wholesalers or do the drying themselves by buying fish from boats in their fishing villages. These women sit in the market till about 10 or 11.30 p.m. Customers are generally those buying for their families.

Though a shed has been built for the fish vendors, they don't use it, preferring to sit on the roadside in spite of the hot sun. They prefer the roadside to the platform because of visibility to customers. They have been asking the chairman of MBKMMVS to ensure they are provided with umbrellas for protection from the sun. "Customers approach the women near the entrance as they are attracted by how the fish looks under the bright light. Inside the market, the gloomy ambience does not make the fish look appealing," said Sunil, caretaker of MBKMMVS. In addition, the platform is too high and lacks steps. Only the wholesale producers and processors find it convenient to unload fish on the ground. So these platforms are used to store unsold fish. Only the men selling salted fish and the Gujarati women vendors use the platforms. The men have been given corner spaces in the market so they are not concerned about the lack of sunlight and Gujarati/non Mumbai women use the platforms as their only other option is to be constricted in an alleyway.

MBKMMVS, the vendors' organization, has over 3500 members from Mumbai and nearby areas. It contributes to the smooth functioning of the market by appointing two men as security who keep an eye on the unsold fish and belongings of MBKMMVS members when the women have to step away from their stalls. The women often have to intervene in minor conflicts between other vendors over space etc.

New entrants to fish vending, i.e. women whose family members have not been allotted space in the market, or those who are from non-fishing communities or from other states (like *ghatis*<sup>2</sup> or *Biharis*<sup>3</sup>) are relegated to the rear of the market which is not a prime spot. There are many old women selling low-value fish and trash fish collected from the wholesale market which operates on Wednesdays and Fridays.

The women retailers pay Rs 20 (US\$ 0.36) as sitting fee to MBKMMVS. The MBKMMVS-appointed caretaker collects this money as a contribution for facilities and services provided such as restrooms, lights, cleaning of water tank, and conflict management. Apart from providing facilities in the market, MBKMMVS organizes medical camps. Apart from this, BMC personnel come on Fridays to collect a small fee of Rs 5 (US\$ 0.09) to Rs 10 (US\$ 0.18) depending on whether the woman is a retail or wholesale vendor. MBKMMVS claims they (BMC) do not provide any services, nor do they approve of any of the MBKMMVS initiatives.

## THE WHOLESALE MARKET

The wholesale market at Marol functions on Wednesdays and Fridays, attracting traders and vendors from not just the Mumbai region but also from other districts in the state and even from the neighbouring state of Gujarat. The women wholesalers usually bring their menfolk's catch to the market or they may buy fish from the boats and process the fish using either the labour available within their family or hired labour. These women come from various parts of Mumbai; Gorai, Versova, Dharavi and Madh Island in the suburban district; Patwadi, Bhati, Nayanagar, Manori, Uttan, Patan, Lighthouse, Moragaon, Vasai and Palghar from Thane district. Once they have accumulated a good amount of produce, they come to the market. These women come in the morning and once their fish is auctioned they leave, usually by late afternoon. They may also go to other dry fish markets depending on the quantity and quality of fish they have and when each market has its wholesale day.

The market starts early morning each Wednesday. Trucks loaded with dry *bombil* from Gujarat start coming in around at 3 or 4 a.m. With daybreak, the *coolies* (labour) hired by the truck owners start unloading the fish while the trucker's family (wife or mother) supervises. The traders collect the fish directly from the unloading point; there is no auctioning as the deal has been struck back in Gujarat through the traders' connections. By 1 p.m. the Gujarat traders leave.

Each truck is accompanied by a driver, owner or agent, wife (in case of owner), and one helper. In one part of the market, there are three weighing scales provided by a private person. The trader and buyer who have agreed on a price will get the fish weighed here. Both parties keep an eye on the weighing. Usually the buyer hires a couple of people to hold the balance, place the weights and record the weight. Someone from the trader's side will load and unload the fish on to the weighing scale. Conflict may occur over the accuracy of the weighing. Once everything is settled to mutual satisfaction, the buyer can load the fish into his truck with the help of hired labour.

Local traders and buyers from other parts of the state come early in the morning. Some buy the fish as soon as it is unloaded, others wait to assess all possibilities such as waiting to see what the local women vendors (wholesalers) bring. Many of the local traders and buyers will do a round of the market to check prices and see what bargains are possible. Women buyers are rare, mainly men are seen negotiating prices. Whatever fish is not sold is packed and stored in the shed for the next day. Usually fish is sold within two days.

Women wholesalers from nearby districts come in by 5:30 a.m. on Fridays. They are organized as co-operative societies or just form informal groups to reduce transportation costs. They bring truck-loads of fish that are not usually available with the Gujarat traders. The women auction the fish or sell on *shekada* basis (i.e. the rate is fixed per 100 pieces). The price varies with quality and quantity and from transaction to transaction. By afternoon, the fish has been sold and the women head back. The day this researcher visited the market, the wholesale price for *bombil* was Rs 130 (US\$ 2.37) per kg and Rs 50 (US\$ 0.91) to Rs 80 (US\$ 1.46) for anchovies.

Wholesale sellers and processors have to pay a fee to MBKMMVS. The rate is fixed per basket of fish; currently it is Rs 20 (US\$ 0.36) to Rs 30 (US\$ 0.55). Trucks and traders coming from Gujarat and elsewhere have to pay Rs 300 (US\$ 5.47) to Rs 500 (US\$ 9.11) each time. Like in the retail market, the money is collected by the MBKMMVS caretaker.

The day this researcher visited Marol market, 11 trucks from Gujarat were parked in the market. There is no estimate of how many buyers from the districts come to the wholesale market. As it is wholesale market, women are not given licences.

## **SUPPLEMENTARY BUSINESSES**

A local person provides the weighing services in Marol market. He has three *katas* or weighing scales. This person in Marol market, though not from the fishing community, said this was his family business. He gets Rs 4 (US\$ 0.07) per kg of fish weighed. The cost is shared equally by the seller and buyer.

At one end of the market, processing and salting of waste fish takes place on a small to medium scale. This business, carried out by outsiders i.e. non-fishing community members, has been going on for many years. Through the week they go to Colaba or Sasoan Dock to buy high-value fish rejected by export companies and bulk fish from boats through auctions. Since the availability of fish varies, there are days when no auctioning takes place. The fish is brought to Marol market, cleaned and salted. After 4 to 5 days of salting, the fish is ready for sale for wholesale or retail as traders from other parts of Maharashtra buy it and local people are also fond of this fish.

## **ROLE OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION**

MBKMMVS plays an important role in providing facilities in the market, a role that BMC has failed to play. As mentioned earlier, BMC took a long time to develop

the market but the women found the facilities provided by the BMC unsuitable. MBKMMVS has also been instrumental in providing security. The women said that earlier the market had been the hangout of drunkards, which changed when lights were installed and security was provided. MBKMMVS has also provided an office space where women who come from far can rest and refresh themselves. It has also provided clean restrooms for the women, and hired two women to maintain these facilities. Other improvements made by MBKMMVS are lights in the vicinity of the market, and ensuring that the water tank is cleaned twice a year and constantly maintained. All this costs MBKMMVS Rs 10,000 (US\$ 182.24) per month.

As women eat their meals in the sun MBKMMVS has requested BMC to let them build a canteen, where in addition to a comfortable, hygienic place to eat, the women can also get food at reasonable rates. BMC is yet to give MBKMMVS permission but MBKMMVS continues to work around these problems. Since MBKMMVS took over the functioning of market, say the women, BMC does nothing except collect a fee of Rs 5 (US\$ 0.09) from each local vendor and Rs 10 (US\$ 0.18) per basket from the women wholesalers who come in on Fridays. The money is collected by the market inspector who is accompanied by the market supervisor and his two assistants. The women prefer to approach MBKMMVS when problems arise.

## **ISSUES IN STRUCTURED MARKETS**

### **MARKET FACILITIES AND MANAGEMENT**

As illustrated above, almost all markets lack basic facilities, though regular payments are made to BMC for provision of such facilities. Women vendors consider it essential that such facilities are provided on an urgent basis to ensure decent working conditions. There are also demands for addressing issues such as conflicts over space, by clearly demarcating the space of each vendor. There are also other kinds of conflicts. In large wholesale markets like Shivaji mandai or Malad market, where women vendors buy their fish, fish is sold by the kilogram, unlike in small landing centres, where it is auctioned. Often the sellers in these markets tamper with the weighing process to cheat the women. Women are demanding systems be put in place to check such frauds through regular monitoring of the weighing scales.

### **ACCESS TO FISH**

A key issue is availability of fish to vend. Vendors complain of a growing fish scarcity, while fish prices continue to skyrocket, making fish vending unprofitable. To counter this trend, the women demand that the government

work to safeguard women vendors' access to fish at landing centres and harbours. Supporting the development of women's co-operatives and their capacity building is an option to be considered.

### **CREDIT**

Fisherwomen have largely relied on their relatives and pawning their own jewellery for their credit needs. Gold jewellery is often bought not for its ornamental value but as a form of savings that can be liquidated easily; but buying gold these days is an expensive proposition. Women avoid going for formal credit systems because of the paperwork involved, though many have approached fisheries co-operative societies for loans. Better access to credit remains a critical issue that needs to be addressed.

### **LICENCES**

Many women who have traditionally been vending fish in markets are yet to receive licences, even as those who are seen as more recent entrants have obtained licences. This is an issue that needs urgent attention, given the implications for continued access to vending spaces and compensation received during market development.

### **REDEVELOPMENT OF MARKETS THROUGH THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

As discussed, there are several concerns regarding redevelopment of markets by private developers, especially as such redevelopment plans have been bogged by issues of lack of transparency and accountability, as well as corruption, including by leaders of market associations. It is uncertain whether, under the circumstances, the interests of genuine women fish vendors can be protected. Some market vendors groups, such as the one in Gopitank market in Matunga, have tried to clearly put forth their demands, including registration of the vendors as owners of the market space, with the costs of the process borne by the developers; a time frame for redevelopment fixed, with monetary penalties for defaulting; a list of amenities provided and all paperwork done in the local language, namely, Marathi; and representation of women vendors ensured in the monitoring body.

### **MIGRANT VENDORS**

Women fish vendors feel threatened by the entry of migrant male vendors into the fish-vending business as they feel it is eroding their customer base. This is a sensitive issue, with political overtones. (See section on migrant vendors in unstructured markets for more information.)

## **SUPPORT AND CAPACITY BUILDING**

Women fish vendors, operating from markets that lack even basic facilities feel threatened by growing competition from malls and mobile vendors. They demand greater support for their activities and for training, for example, towards value-addition, undertaking home delivery, etc., which will enable them to retain their spaces and livelihoods. Women feel the need to adopt new strategies to deal with the rapidly changing context for which they need training and organization, and access to basic education as well as guidance in starting small-scale businesses.

## **ORGANIZATION OF WOMEN**

Women vendors, in general, remain poorly organized at the market or community level. They are often denied membership in the general co-operatives though the boatowners' wives are accepted as members. They are also not well represented in decision-making positions within fishworker organizations. There are divisions within market associations. The need to strengthen the organizations of women vendors and their representation in other organizations, remains important.

## **ACCESS TO SCHEMES AND COMPENSATION**

The Fisheries Department does not have any schemes dedicated to the welfare of women vendors, unlike in other States. Women vendors demand social security (including savings-cum-relief schemes, widow and old-age pension) and schemes that will support their activities and help improve their capacity to meet the rapidly changing context and growing competition. They also want to be entitled to compensation for the loss of livelihood suffered through incidents like the oil spill from *Chitra Khalija*.

## **SUPPLEMENTARY LIVELIHOODS**

Since many of the women vendors do not go to the market daily, they feel the need for alternative or supplementary income-generating avenues in fisheries, including marketing.



## **SECTION 4**

### **UNSTRUCTURED MARKETS**

#### **STREET FISH MARKETS**

The 2009 National Street Vendors policy defines a street vendor as “a person who offers goods or services for sale to the public in a street without having a permanent built-up structure”. It further classifies street vendors based on their mobility into 'stationary' (those who sell regularly from a specific location in a public space), 'peripatetic' (those who hawk their wares by roaming the streets on foot, carrying their wares on their person), and 'mobile' (those who move around using some kind of public or private transport that may or may not be motorized). Most women fish vendors fall within the first two categories, while the mobile vendors are usually men.

In almost every city, the majority of street vendors, especially fish vendors, are women. Historically too, women have dominated fish vending, not only in structured markets but also in unstructured street markets and in door-to-door vending. According to Shaila Keni, a door-to-door vendor and an MMKS member, there are approximately 15,000 women who are engaged in door-to-door vending activities in Mumbai city and suburbs. There are around 70 street fish markets in Greater Mumbai. Case studies of the Ganesh Nagar street fish market in Wadala, Mumbai, and of a door-to-door vendor follow.

#### **CASE STUDY:**

#### **GANESH NAGAR MARKET, WADALA**

Ganesh Nagar is a low-income area with a large population of Dalits, in Wadala, which is a centrally located area in Mumbai city. There are three main junctions where street fish markets function in this area. Street markets are often natural markets that arose from the needs of the local populace. Ganesh Nagar is an example of this, with several small entrepreneurs meeting a range of daily needs of their customers. These entrepreneurs are street vendors of vegetable, meat, poultry and fish, and some are grocers, who set up shop by modifying the front of their houses.

The Ganesh Nagar market caters mostly to low- and middle-income communities. Fish sold here is of low value, and the women sell small quantities of fish. As Wadala is not a fishing village, there are few *koli* women vendors at the market. Most of the women are from the Scheduled Castes or are

Dalits. Women sit on the roadside to sell fish along main roads and highways. These women, who have been street vendors for the last 15 years, do not have even semi-permanent structures. They buy fish from Bhauch Dhakka, also known as New Ferry Wharf. Buying expeditions are usually done in groups of five or six, and a 'tempo' (a small local van) is hired to transport them and their wares. The second choice for sourcing fish is Sassoon Docks.

Their day starts at 5 a.m., and they reach their vending place by 9 a.m. The women are able to buy mostly small fish as fish prices are increasing and their customers buy mostly small fish like anchovies, oil sardines, *dhoma*, Bombay duck and prawns. None of them sell expensive fish like pomfret or king fish. Shobha explained the economics behind this decision. She said, "Fish prices have gone up. Fish that used to cost Rs 200 (US\$ 3.65) is now Rs 1,000 (US\$ 18.23). So a batch of upmarket fish, keeping in mind the species and quality, can put me back by Rs 500 (US\$ 9.11) to Rs 1,000 (US\$ 18.23). If I take my usual load of four or five batches, I cannot afford these expensive fish. And since we cannot keep fish overnight, I cannot afford to buy fish that may be left over at the end of the day". She points out that vendors buy fish based on their customers' preferences as well.

## SITUATION

As this is a street vendors' market, it is unstructured and unregulated. Women sit under their umbrellas to protect themselves from inclement weather. Though they do not have to pay any rent or sitting charges, they do not enjoy basic facilities like drinking water, restrooms, and so on. They have to collect their fish waste and dispose it in BMC's waste bins down the road. They start business around 9.30 a.m., displaying fish on wooden planks balanced on wooden or thermocol (polystyrene) boxes. If their fish does not get sold out in the morning, they set up shop again in the evening after a break between 1:30 p.m. and 4 p.m. They prefer to sell the fish in the morning since they have no cold storage. Lata, a vendor with 34 years of experience, says, "I used to do door-to-door vending, but for the last 15 years I have been sitting here in the market because I found carrying big baskets around difficult. So I sit here and if fish remains, I keep it on ice outside my home."

Street vendors are very vulnerable to government whims and fancies. They can be pushed out by BMC authorities any time. In addition, the threat of displacement due to development is ever-present. The women sit on the edge of a 100-foot road, which the government is planning to expand, threatening the women's livelihoods. Shobha says, "This is our own place; nobody else can come and

sit in our place. Only thing is, we don't have formal recognition. Even if we register, where is the place? Now the road is going to be widened, so where will we go? Even if we were registered, we will not be given any space elsewhere. These lands belong to the government or are private property (referring to the markets), so we have no rights and will have to vacate when there is development," she said. Personally, however, Shobha is not concerned, since she is relatively well-off and her children are not planning to be fish vendors. When asked about their opinion on how many women will continue working as vendors in the face of such problems, the response was mixed. One vendor in her late fifties said, "My husband is handicapped, my two sons are married and have moved away, and I have one younger widowed sister living with me. She goes for door-to-door vending, so I vend on the streets. I don't know anything other than this. I will continue till age permits me."

### **CASE STUDY:**

#### **SHAILA KENI, A DOOR-TO-DOOR VENDOR**

Shaila Keni is a door-to-door vendor who has recently taken up cudgels on the behalf of such vendors under the banner of MMKS. "We door-to-door vendors go to the market to buy fish. We also buy from the vendors who sit in the market. We don't have a political leader supporting us unlike the *bhaiyas*. In a way, we do not have an identity because of this," she comments, referring to the support of the influx of migrant men from north India by political parties such as the Congress (I), the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and the BJP. The fallout of this lack of political support is that the women have been unable to get identity cards associating them with a political party. "When the police are called and they question us, it is useful to show such identity cards. The *bhaiyas* have cards and so they find it easier to deal with the police," she mourned.

When asked whether women vendors like her would be ready to switch to vending in the market, if given space in markets, Keni answered in the negative. "The regular market vendors will not allow us to sit in the markets; it will mean more competition. Anyway, mobile vending has the advantage of taking fresh fish to the customer's doorstep. A lot of women appreciate and prefer this service," she added.

On the market vendors' argument that door-to-door vending was eating into their customer base, she dismissed it, saying that door-to-door vendors sell only a quarter of what the market vendors sell. "We have our loyal customers who do not visit the market, so there is no question of reducing customer flow to the market. And no matter what, even if the BMC bans door-to-door vending, we will continue with our profession," she said.

“Like market women, we also go to buy fish between 5 a.m. and 5.30 a.m. While the market-based vendors start their business around 9.30 a.m., we have to reach our customers’ doors by 8.30 a.m. or 9 a.m. We vend only in the morning and don’t go out in the evening. We have our fixed areas where we vend. For example, Mori road area in Mahim is mine. However, two other women often come here as well as the *bhaiya*. But I have my loyal customers who will buy from the others only if I don’t turn up. We (women) don’t quarrel over areas; it is understood who can go to which area. Also, these areas are ‘inherited’ from our mothers or aunts. Nowadays, this understanding of territories is eroding; *bhaiyas* have started selling in our areas and since nobody stops them, we cannot question a new woman vendor who might enter our area. “

“The *bhaiyas* will sell whatever is cheap, whether it is fish or fruit, but we fisherwomen don’t do this. So when the fish is too expensive, we don’t have any work; instead, we stay at home. If we don’t get fresh fish, we buy dry fish even if the profit is as small as Rs 50 (US\$ 0.91). We buy fish keeping in mind our customers’ preferences. Sometimes we also reduce the price if the customer looks poor.”

“Some of our customers are sensitive to our difficulties and try and help us. One such woman in Churchgate used to pay me a couple of hundred more (for the fish) than what I asked because she said we are selling it too cheap. Unfortunately, she has left for America. Equally, there are stingy customers who will bargain hard and bring the price down by half or more. They always remind me of the saying “*kai ha sansar kai, ha bazar.*”<sup>14</sup> Sometimes, nobody buys fish, so then we have a problem of storing the fish and ensuring it doesn’t spoil. “

“I wish there could be an organization of door-to-door women vendors. We can organize at least 5,000 women on one call, but we need to have plans and ideas; just calling a meeting is pointless. When the *Chitra Khalija* oil spill occurred, Ujjwala *tai* (Ujjwala Patil of MMKS) asked the government about compensation for door-to-door vendors (as such women are invisible when it comes to schemes and policies). We were told to become members of a co-operative society first. Since door-to-door vendors are not organized or registered in any government database, government red tape ensures we are not counted among those eligible to access government aid. I asked the co-operative society about accepting us women as members, but they refused saying you women quarrel. “How then are the boatowners’ wives made members?”, she counters. They asked us to join a women’s co-operative like the Mumbai District Women’s Co-operative set up by Trija Killekar in Dharavi.

So I collected Rs 50 (US\$ 0.91) from each woman, and filled up forms to get membership of MMKS; but this too has not helped in getting any compensation or government aid. Unfortunately, the women who we enrolled as MMKS members thought that paying Rs 50 (US\$ 0.91) would make them eligible for compensation; the idea of union membership was not familiar to them. So now they refuse to work towards joining any organization or pushing for any collective action if it means paying even a small sum. They would rather spend Rs 500 (US\$ 9.11) on frivolous things than contribute to the betterment of fish vendors."

"Though I am a member of MMKS, there are things I don't like. They tell me to attend meetings and organize door-to-door vendors but, frankly, as a parent, I don't have the time to attend union meetings and voice my opinion as I have to do all the housework, take care of my son, and sell fish," adds Keni.

Discussing the demands of door-to-door vendors, she said, "We don't have demands as such, but door-to-door women vendors should be given identity cards and facilities (referring to access to fish, competition from male vendors, etc.). Even if these don't match what the market vendors get, that is okay. If market women received Rs 3,000 (US\$ 54.67) under a drought package, why can't the door-to-door vendors get at least Rs 1,000 (US\$ 18.23)?"

Both door-to-door and market vending have their advantages and disadvantages, Keni believes. Market vendors don't have to walk around all day, so they buy more fish but, at the same time, if the fish isn't sold, their loss is more. Market vendors have a greater input cost, so that also increases the risk.

Keni also spoke of how even fisheries organizations are uninterested in women vendor issues. "Koli Mahila Mase Vikreta Sangha once invited me to a meeting and asked me to deliver a speech on behalf of door-to-door women vendors, but I was not given any time to speak," Keni points out. At the end of the meeting, I stood up and asked angrily, "I consider the market vendors my sisters but they have not supported us in the *bhaiya hatao andolans*. Don't all these groups need to be united for vendors' organizations to work properly?"

On the difference between traditional women vendors and *bhaiyas*, Keni says, "We get access to residential buildings because we know our customers by name, so when the watchman asks whose house we are going to, we can answer. *Bhaiyas* don't have this knowledge, so they can only shout from the street and hope for customers." However, the *bhaiyas'* profit margins are greater because they live cheaply and buy in groups directly from the landing centre. This group buying allows them access to more money but it also pushes the fish prices up. Now they (the *bhaiyas*) have become organized, so all they have to do is pay

their organization Rs1 per day to solve any problems. Our women, however, are unwilling to pay regular fees.”

“Our women too have been buying in groups for a long time. They go in groups of five. We go to the landing centre to buy at auctions according to the demands of group members and then divide it in equal shares. We also share the cost of fish transport.”

When asked about her expectations for the future, Keni instantly replied, “Forget the future, I am more worried about tomorrow. We door-to-door vendors are not interested in sitting in markets; there are already women selling here. Yet the market vendors accuse us of stealing their customers. It is actually the *bhaiya* who is a threat, not us”.

Discussing her family, she spoke of how managing home and hearth as well as organizing the vendors is impossible. Her husband, she said, was supportive of her entering politics but he soon realized it was not an option. “I told him I would stand for elections if he would take care of the house and our family,” she said. If things continue to get worse, we door-to-door vendors will have little option but to take action.

## **ISSUES IN UNSTRUCTURED MARKETS**

### **STREET VENDOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

The implementation of the street vendors policy in Mumbai is non-existent. Under the policy, street vendors should be registered and issued identity cards, but this has not been done. Since the vendors are not registered, BMC can, with impunity, demolish street markets and confiscate the vendors’ tools. A formal survey is needed to identify and register vendors and provide them with identity cards, so that women street vendors become visible to fisheries organizations and to the government when it comes to city planning. There is need to address this issue on an urgent basis. The street vendors policy also says vendors should be evicted only if they are working in a no-vending zone and even then, a few hours notice must be given. However, these norms are rarely, if ever, followed. The designation of no-vending zones or restricted vending zones is required to be done in a participatory manner. All these provisions need to be implemented.

### **ACCESS TO SCHEMES AND COMPENSATION**

The issues relating to access to schemes and compensation are the same in both structured and unstructured markets, and have already been detailed in the section on issues in structured markets.

## **MIGRANTS AMONG VENDORS**

Local fish vendors would like to see restrictions on the entry of migrants into the fish-vending business, as they feel that this has affected their customer base. They also feel that *bhaiyās* do not maintain quality standards while distributing fish. This distrust of migrants is part of the larger political culture in the State. The migrants are blamed by many sectors for the loss of jobs, rise in crime, and so on. However, these claims are anecdotal and no proof has been presented to back them. By law, there is no bar on anyone becoming a street vendor. However, for the women, this is a sensitive issue, and it is difficult to bring up the topic of the men's right to join the profession of street vending.

## **ORGANIZATION**

Street market vendors and door-to-door women vendors are not well organized or networked with market organizations and larger fishworkers' movements, though they are amongst the most vulnerable in the sector. Due attention needs to be paid to improving the organization of such vendors, especially towards the implementation of the street vendors policy.

## **SECTION 5**

### FISHERIES ORGANIZATIONS

There are many organizations working on issues related to fisherfolk. These include government or government-supported bodies like the Fisheries Department of the Government of Maharashtra, the National Co-operative Development Corporation (NCDC), NFDB and MPEDA.

There are also fishworker organizations such as MMKS and co-operative societies. These organizations lack adequate representation of women in decision-making bodies. Women, if present in these organizations' upper hierarchy, are there only because of their menfolk. There are also various women's organizations like the now dysfunctional Mumbai Mahila Mase Vikreta Sangha, which was a trade union, the Mumbai District Women's Co-operative, and some market-specific organizations like Rajashree Bhanji's Marol Bazar Koli Mahila Mase Vikreta Sanstha. However, there is not a single non-governmental organization (NGO) working on fisherwomen's issues.

Finally, there are politically affiliated organizations like the *macchimar* cells of the BJP, the Congress (I) and the NCP, who claim to take up the issues of fisherwomen in the political discourse at the State and national levels. Though they do not have fully functional women's units, they see women's issues as a part of the fishing community's issues.

Profiles of some of these organizations are provided below.

#### **MAHARASHTRA MACCHIMAR MASE VIKRETA SANGHA (MMMVS)**

Set up in November 2004 as a trade union, the organization shut shop in 2008, when a member was accused of corruption. Started with the sole purpose of helping women vendors in stationary markets, the organization had around 2,300 women vendors as members from 23 markets across the city. This organization has played an active role in ensuring that licences were issued to the women vendors by BMC, by organizing *andolans* in 2005; it has also raised women's issues in mainstream fisheries meetings, and looked into the basic facilities available to women in markets. The organization ran into trouble when one of its senior members was accused of colluding with the builders in the restructuring of markets and not delivering on promises to get vendors their licences while taking money for the same. The organization was dissolved, and the issue of corruption was taken to the court, where it is pending



judgement. MMMVS members have moved on to other organizations working with women fish vendors.

### **MAHARASHTRA MACCHIMAR KRUTI SAMITEE (MMKS)**

MMKS is a State-level fishworkers' organization affiliated to the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF). Being a part of a larger movement, it has contributed widely to fisheries discourses at the national and State levels. It has members in all five coastal districts of the State. Members are usually chairpersons of co-operative societies and active fishers. Though women members outnumber the men and though women have been at the forefront of MMKS protests and marches, their participation in organizational decisionmaking is low, and there has been no focus on addressing women's issues. Problems faced by women were habitually brushed aside as 'women's issues', and which, therefore, had nothing to do with the organization. This changed a few years ago when the women's wing of the organization was formed. Now Ujjwala Patil, with the support of Purnima Mehar, a founder member of MMKS, works on women's issues within the organization and at the community level. Both women entered this area when they realized how marginalized women are within the organization's hierarchy. This realization came with personal experience of being one of the few active women in MMKS. The MMKS women's wing is still at a nascent stage; work has begun on building a network at various levels but problems of funding and training have hampered work. Unlike in some other States, women in Maharashtra are not organized. Many organizations, like fisheries co-operatives, do not consider women as part of their membership base; neither have government bodies involved women in managing the markets and so on.

### **CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES**

According to an unpublished study by Dharmesh Shah (for ICSF), almost each fishing village in Maharashtra has a co-operative society. The first co-operative in the State, the Satpati Fishermens' Sarvodaya Sahakari Society Limited, was created by a freedom fighter and fishworker leader, Narayan Dandekar.

According to Shah's study, "The benefits enjoyed by women members in this co-operative are illustrative. With a male-dominated membership, the services offered to the women members are limited to subsidized ice and cold storage. Each woman is entitled to nearly 10 kg of ice but, in case of scarcity, the boatowners get priority. The society's current role as an agent between fishermen and exporters is also its primary source of income. There is a lack of initiative in addressing women's issues due to the skewed gender ratio in

membership. Two positions on the board are reserved for women, as per government directives, but these women have been unable to initiate change. One of the women members, Vimla, says, 'Being part of the society has not helped us much. We deal with most of the issues ourselves.' Occasionally, a scheme for fisherwomen is also availed through the co-operative, like the MPEDA scheme under which ice boxes were provided to fish vendors. These schemes usually fall short of their projected expectation; in Satpati, only 200 of the 2,000 women who applied received the boxes."

## **WOMEN'S CO-OPERATIVES**

Women in Maharashtra were helped by men to develop their own societies. There are several women's co-operatives in the State, which focus on a range of issues. Most of these co-operatives have been built by women with the help of their menfolk. The Mumbai Zilha Mahila Sahakari Sanstha looks into vendors' issues. The Arnala women's co-operative is fairly new and so has not gone beyond procuring and selling fish and distributing the share among women at the Arnala landing centre. A new move by them is to sell directly to the big merchants. For this, the co-operative's committee members go early to the landing centre and procure fish, which is sold to merchants. Profits are distributed among the society's members.

The Mumbai District Women's Co-operative is a federation of women vendors in Mumbai city and its suburbs. This society is politically active as its leader, Trija Killekar, has a political background. They organize *andolans* and marches on women's issues.

## **SECTION 6**

### CONCLUSION

This study has been an attempt to understand the problems and challenges faced by women fish vendors operating in both formal and informal spaces in Mumbai. It found that while many of the challenges faced are common to both kinds of vendors, there are also some issues unique to certain groups of vendors. The study flags many of these problems and challenges as well as the proposals that are being made by the vendors, as they struggle to retain their spaces and protect their livelihoods.

In conclusion, it is clear that in metros like Mumbai, women vendors, whether formal or informal, are getting affected by development forces. The vendors are caught between private developers, who are looking to develop the markets that are located in prime real estate, and the government authorities who control the markets. Fisherwomen may be the largest women labour force engaged for generations in one business, namely, fish marketing; yet, they are on the verge of extinction due to their inability to regroup and restructure themselves and due to the negligence of the fisheries sector organizations in protecting their interests.

Small organizations that began with the aim of aiding women vendors were destroyed by in-house corruption or have become divisive over political and economic agendas. The changing face of Mumbai city has impacted the fisherfolk's way of life; pollution and infrastructure projects on the coast have decimated nearshore fisheries. The livelihoods of women vendors and processors have been affected by reduced access to resources such as space and clean water. In addition, unemployment among the menfolk in the family has increased the burden on the women. Workplace pressures in the form of sub-optimal working conditions have also added to the health woes of the women vendors.

Fish marketing, once the domain of these women, is being taken over by male vendors and by malls and upscale shops that promise home delivery. There has been some talk, among community leaders and educated youth, of the women entering new arenas in marketing such as setting up small food-processing businesses, food stalls and fish-delivery businesses in an attempt to adapt to changing conditions. However, the women would need to be trained for these alternatives.

Post-harvest fisheries are not considered important by the fisheries sector in Maharashtra. There is a lack of infrastructure for post-harvest fisheries; the main landing centres—New Ferry Wharf and Sassoon Dock – are unable to deal with the volume of traffic; also, the existing facilities have not been maintained well. Construction of new jetties and facelifts to the docks were finally approved by the State government in 2012.

It is to be hoped that these developments will address the concerns of the post-harvest sector, such as the construction of new wholesale and retail markets, and the monitoring and management of these markets. Attracting central and State funds remains a crucial task with the authorities. Despite funds being available with the corporation and other local agencies, priority is given to private-sector development, with the support of political parties. This issue can be addressed only if the fishing community exerts pressure on elected officials. The mainstream fisheries movement, unfortunately, has not focused on these issues, which are important for the women.

Developing new markets and ensuring women vendors have adequate facilities and access to social-security measures is easier said than done. There is a dearth of organizations focusing on women. Women's participation and membership in mainstream co-operatives are also limited as women rarely have the time to take up active roles in these organizations, saddled as they are with the dual burden of earning a living and managing the household.

Women vendors' interests will be taken care of only when they have representation and participation in mainstream fisheries bodies. In addition, if the women are to take informed decisions on their livelihoods, they require data. There is a paucity of data on women in the fishing economy, starting with the landing centres.

Evidently, Mumbai's women vendors of fish are not part of the new 'Shining India' that the country's planners, economists, government officials and politicians boast of. Partaking of this aspiration of growth and development will remain a distant dream for these women unless they can be better organized and their voices heard loudly and clearly.

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## **APPENDICES**

### CHECKLIST FOR KEY INFORMANTS

#### **A. Name of the key informant and note on his/her relation to the market**

#### **B. General Information of Market**

Name of the market :

Address:

Roadside or separate land?

Approximate area:

If on separate land, ownership status of market land:

Owned by: Private / Market Committee / Government / Municipality / Panchayat/ Any Other

#### **C. Background of Market**

Can you throw light on the history of this market? How was it started and developed, the assistance it got, the conflicts within, and the current situation of the market?

If owned by municipality/private body/market committee, what is the assistance and role of BMC/govt. in managing the market?

What are the problems they are facing while managing the market?

At what level are women fish vendors or their associations interacting while decisions are being made? Do they have representatives on these decision-making bodies?

Fish vendors have user rights to the market by: a tax system/private land/street vending

If by a tax system, then how does the authority monitor and regulate the system—whether through licences, lease or any other means.

How many vendors have licences? Who are left out of the process and why?

**D. Facilities Available in the Market:**

Vending Space:

Space per vendor.....Sq ft.

Built up (Y / N)

Platform (Y / N)

Toilet: (Y / N)

If yes, how many? .....

ii) Separate for male and female? (Y / N)

iii) Supply of water in the toilets. (Y / N)

Cleanliness and hygiene standard: Good / Fair / Bad

Water Supply in the Market:

Piped / Tube Well / Well / From a place away from market

Adequate / Inadequate

Drainage system of waste water from the market: (Y / N)

i) If yes, drainage standard? Good / Fair / Bad

Electricity Supply in the Market: (Y / N)

i) If yes, availability of lighting: (Y / N)

ii) Availability of fan: (Y / N)

Market Cleaning:

Done by: Municipality / Panchayat / Market Committee / Vendors

ii) Standard of market cleaning: Good / Fair / Bad

## **D.2. Facilities available with Fish Vendors:**

Tray for fish display available to: All / Some / None

Ice box for fish storage to: All / Some / None

Digital weighing machine to: All / Some / None

Chopping board to: All / Some / None

## **E. Upgradation of Facilities or Redevelopment of Market**

Any govt. scheme to build up /upgrade market? (Y / N)

If yes, then details of scheme? If no, then which other agencies have been approached for the same?

Has the market committee or the municipality approached NFDB for redevelopment of markets or upgradation of infrastructure facilities or received funding under JNNURM schemes for infrastructure up gradation?

If yes, then how did they become aware of the scheme, at what level were they helped and whether work under it is complete? If not, then what are the reasons why it is incomplete?

In case of builders and redevelopment plans, what is your perception and experience? And what strategies did you apply (or can be applied) while dealing with redevelopment of markets?

With this modernization of the market, what can be achieved? What are the pros and cons or modernization and how can it help the fisher vendors per se?

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## CHECKLIST FOR WOMEN VENDORS

### **A. General information**

1. Name
2. Age
3. Education
4. Religion
5. Type of vending

### **B. Descriptive information about work and household**

1. Her working day
2. Household tasks
3. Co-operation from family
4. Fish access at landing centres
5. Fish in older days and now
6. Transport of fish to market – by what means? Challenges faced
7. Working conditions
8. Challenges at the market
9. Social-security schemes
10. Membership in organizations
11. Demands

### **C. Perception of development**

1. Participation in market committee activities or leadership positions held at community or political levels
2. Her perception about upgradation of facilities or upcoming redevelopment of the market
3. Her opinion about private development and government redevelopment of the market
4. Whether she has a licence or not, and her challenges in obtaining one

**D. In case of Informal vendors**

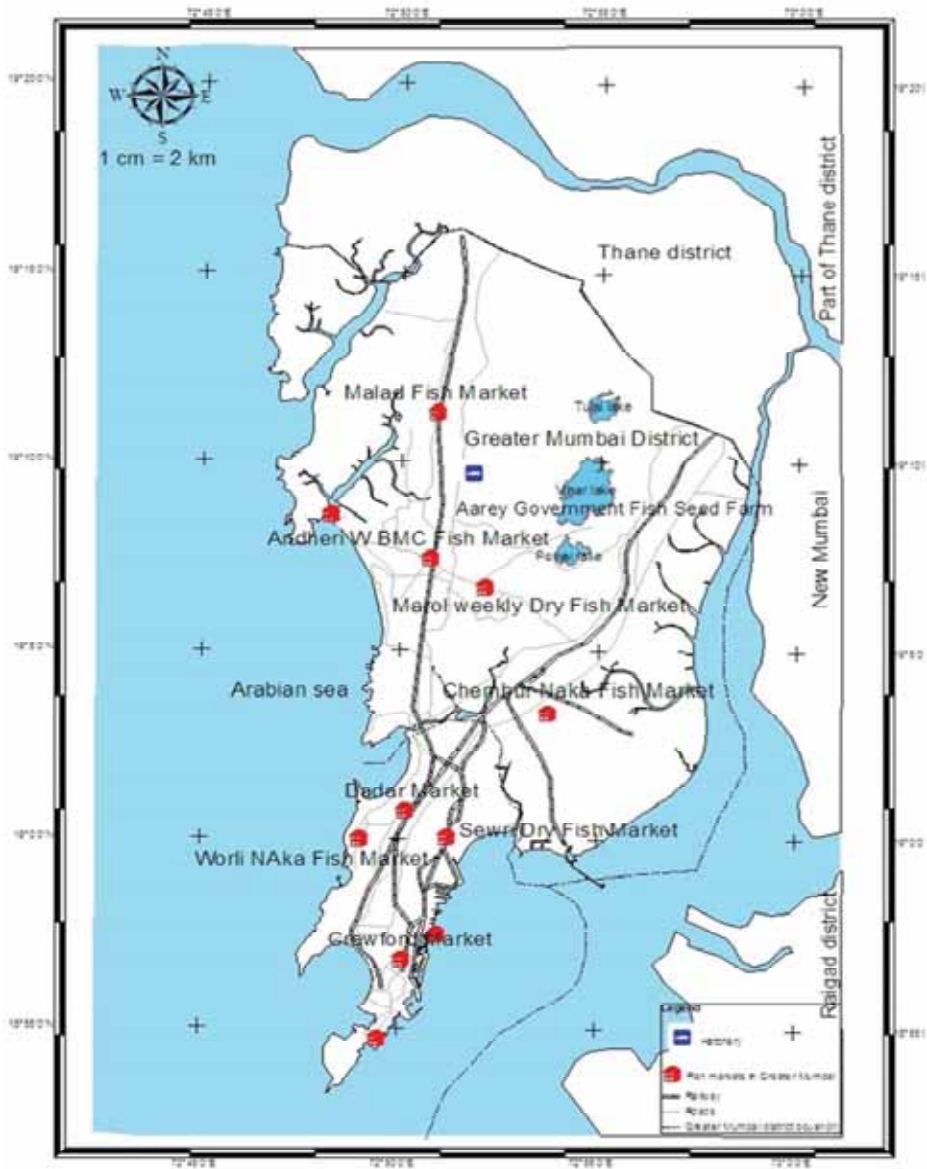
1. Challenges of being a street vendor
2. Her experience of eviction, if any
3. In case of door-to-door vendor, her story of a working day
4. Perception about increasing competition from malls, entry of male vendors

**Table 1: Classification of Markets and List of Landing Centres Visited for the Study**

Landing Centres	Wholesale Market		Retail Market	
	Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal
New Ferry Wharf	Shivaji Mandai	New Ferry Wharf	Adamji Peerbhoy Mandai	Ganesh Nagar Market
Sassoon Dock	Malad Market	Sassoon Dock	Veer Savarkar Mandai	Pikale Market
Versova			Fort Mandai	Versova Market
			Gawade Market	
	Marol Bazar Weekly Dry Fish Market			
			Wakola Market	
			Kamathipura Market	
			Prabhadevi Mandai	
			Gopitank Market	

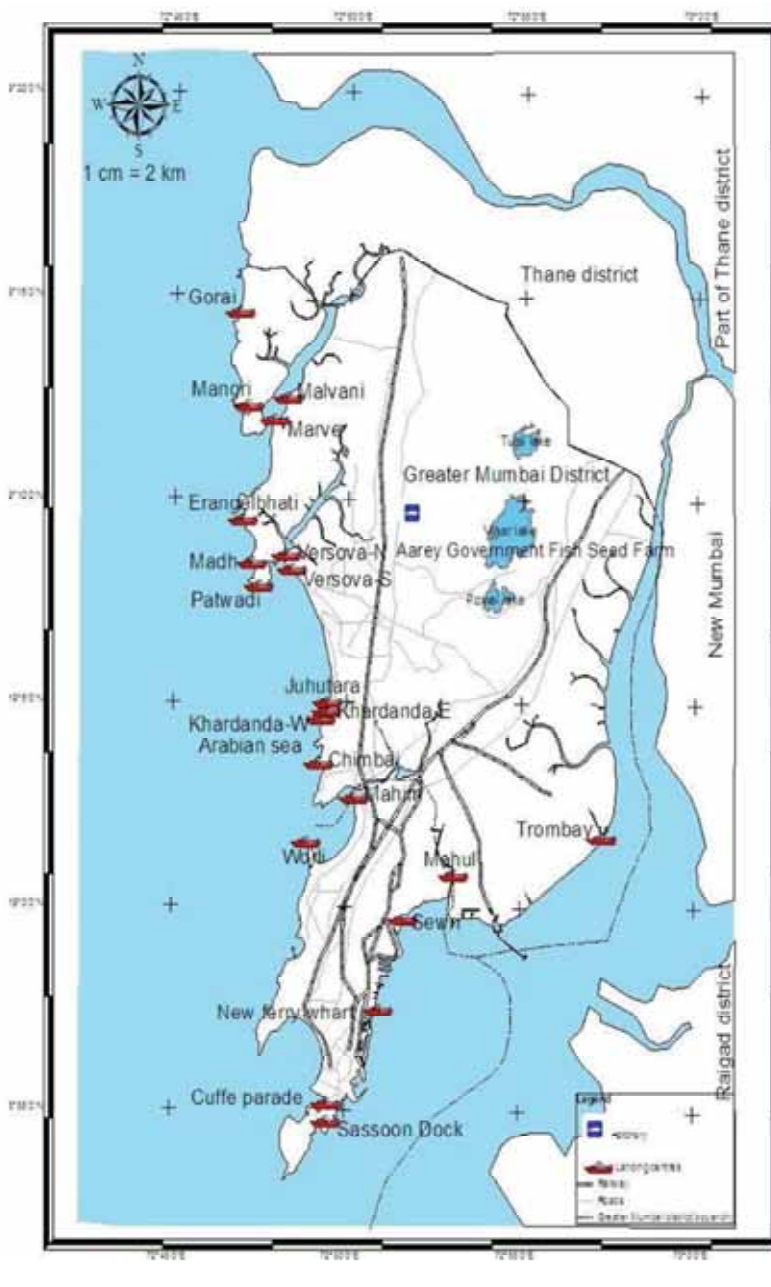
### Fig 1: Important Fish Markets in Greater Mumbai

(Taken from “Thematic Mapping of Fisheries Infrastructural Facilities in Greater Mumbai Region” by S Ghatge, R Biradar and K Lohith Kumar. Central Institute of Fisheries Education, Mumbai)



**Fig 2: Main Landing Centres in Greater Mumbai**

(Taken from “Thematic Mapping of Fisheries Infrastructural Facilities in Greater Mumbai Region” by S Ghatge, R Biradar and K Lohith Kumar. Central Institute of Fisheries Education, Mumbai)





## Endnotes

1. Women processors engaged in drying or salting of wet fish on a small to medium scale, and processors working at landing centres or processing companies on wage labour are not part of this study
2. Motha Colaba, Dhakata Colaba, Mumbai, Mazgaon, Paral, Worli, and Mahim
3. Official language of Maharashtra and also used to refer to a Maharashtrian i.e. *Marathi Manos*
4. Colourful square piece of cloth worn around the waist.
5. Shirt
6. Hat
7. Long white cloth with colourful flowers on the borders worn to cover the breasts.
8. Before BMC took over, the fish markets were run by the landowners - either private owners or charity trusts. These functionaries used to charge a daily sitting fee.
9. A member of the 'untouchable' community who looks after toilets and waste disposal.
10. An administrative division at the sub-district level
11. Fish is referred to as Laxmi, who is the Goddess of Wealth.
12. A person hailing from the *ghats* (hills) of western Maharashtra
13. People from the State of Bihar
14. A comment on the world becoming a marketplace (where everything is haggled, bought and sold).

Monograph

# Women Fish Vendors in Mumbai: A Study Report

Government development programmes and policies in fisheries are focused on the problems and needs of men though women are known to dominate the post-harvest sector in artisanal fisheries and are involved, to varying degrees, in pre-harvest and harvest activities. A lack of women's participation in decision-making bodies within communities, fisheries organizations and government has resulted in a general neglect of their interests. This has led to a constant demand by women's-rights activists and organizations to address market-related issues of women vendors.

This study, "Women Fish Vendors in Mumbai", aims to provide insights into the challenges faced by women fish vendors in the city of Mumbai (formerly Bombay).



ICWF is an international NGO working on issues that concern fishworkers the world over. It is in status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN and is on ILO's Special List of Non-Governmental International Organizations. It also has Liaison Status with FAO. As a global network of community organizers, teachers, technicians, researchers and scientists, ICWF's activities encompass monitoring and research, exchange and training, campaigns and action, as well as communications.

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