

Q & A

Interview of Kulsuma Begum, 35, a dry-fish worker from Kutubdia Para, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

By Moqbul Ahmed (moqbul@coastbd.org), COAST, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Can you describe the work that you do?

I am a dry-fish worker and my work consists of drying and processing fish at Nazirartek in Cox's Bazar.

What are some of the problems that you and other women who are in this line of work face?

We face many problems. The first problem is that our daily wages are very low—only about 100 to 150 taka (US\$1.5 to US\$2) per day; this despite the fact that we put in long hours of work from six in the morning until seven at night. There are no proper toilets for our use and more than a hundred women workers are forced to use an open toilet, on top of which there is no soap and not enough water to clean up with. Our lunchtime is really short and we hardly get enough time to eat. There is no shed for us to work in and so we are forced to work in the open air, exposed to the heat and dust. And finally, the dry-fish unit owner under whom we work uses abusive language towards us the whole time.

Has any women's association been formed to take up the issues of dry-fish workers?

No.

What changes would you want in your working conditions?

What benefits should the government provide?

We are daily wage workers. Our wages are low and working hours are very long. We want our wages increased. We want decent toilet facilities provided to us as well as water and soap for our use. Food is another issue. We have to start from our homes very early at dawn so as to reach the workplace by 6 am. Very often the packed food we carry with us from home goes bad by lunchtime and has to be thrown away. Food is simply not available anywhere near our place of work. This is a big problem. We are demanding that the unit owner provides a cooked meal for us at lunchtime. ❏