



Gendered engagement in dried fish value chains in Sri Lanka

Dried Fish Production in Sri Lanka



- Dried fish is the main fish preservation technique in Sri Lanka
- Dried fish production in Sri Lanka has increased from 5.1% of total fish production (12,000 Mt) in 1995 to 13.9% of total marine fish production (61,250 Mt) in 2020 (MFARD 2019) but again dropped in recent past due to the fuel crisis
- Predominantly produced on the West (Negombo), Northwest (Chilaw/Kalpitiya), North (Jaffna/Mannar), Northeast (Mulaittivu), East (Trincomalee) and South (Tangalle/Dondra) coasts in Sri Lanka
- The contribution of dried fish to the household food expenditure: 3.5 - 4.5%.
- There are two major geographical variations in dried fish production
 - **Marine dried fish**
 - Inland dried fish

Aim of the study



Dried fish processing and small-scale trading form one of the major employment activities in coastal villages for women and men

Wholesaling and retailing of dried fish products is yet another economic activities enlarging business opportunities and livelihoods for urban and rural people

Men and women engagement on these activities are disproportionate with a significant variation ([Slide 4](#))

Remuneration for men and women differ

Aim of the study

To explore gendered engagement in dried fish industry over the dried fish value chains in Sri Lanka ([Slide 6](#))

Considered nodes are : Raw material suppliers (fish and salt)

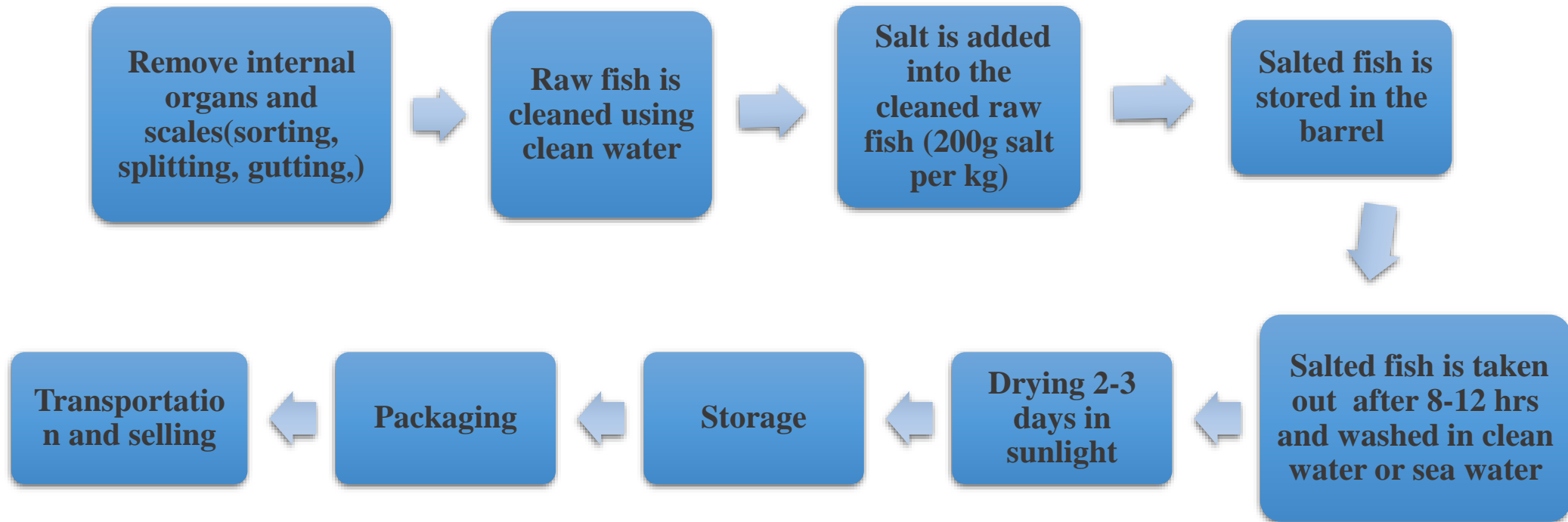
Processors

Wholesalers / Retailers

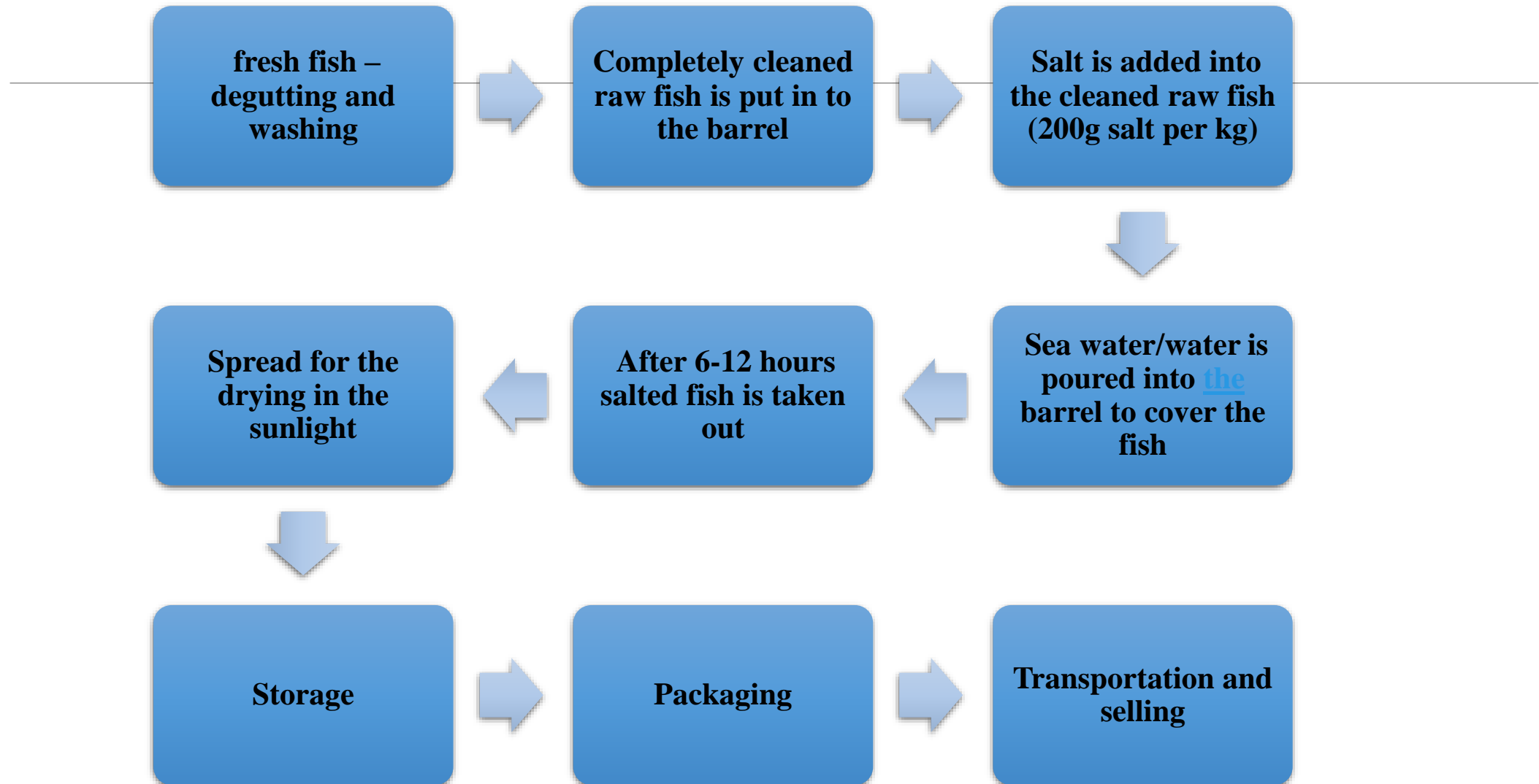
Dried Fish Processing Methods in SL



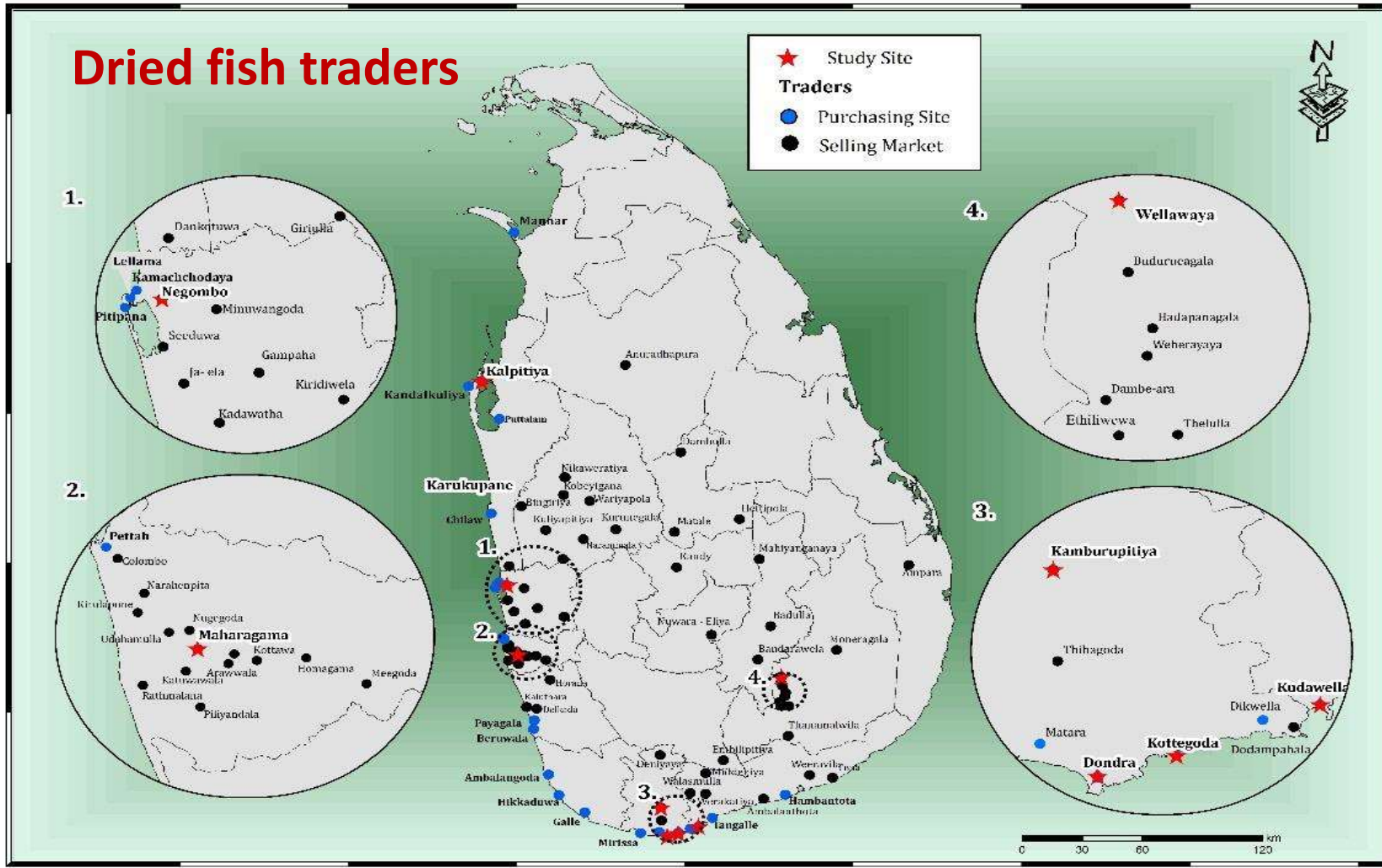
1. Large pelagic dried fish processing method (e.g. skipjack tuna, yellowfin tuna, sword fish, queen fish, shark and etc.)



2. Small pelagic dried fish processing method (e.g. Trenched Sadine, Indian mackerel) [Slide 3](#)



Methodology

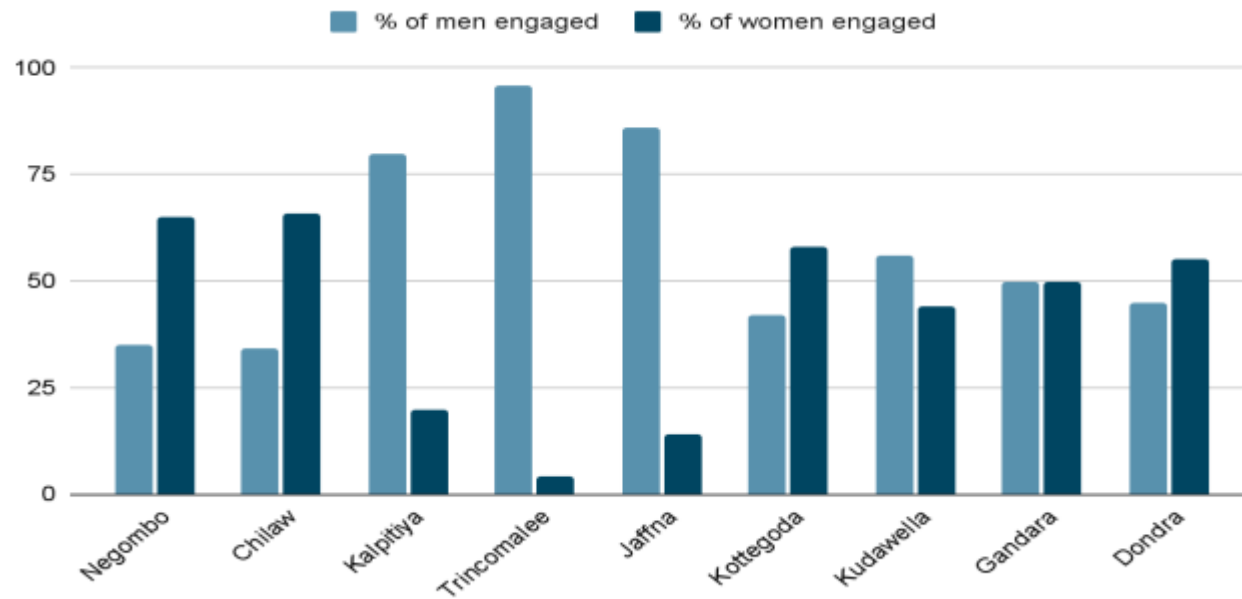




Primary data sources

- Key informant Discussions
- In-depth interviews – fish suppliers, producers, wholesalers, retailers
- Participant observations

Gendered engagement in dried fish processing



- In the medium- to small-scale dried fish processing businesses in Negombo and Chilaw areas, women's participation was double that of men.
- In Matara and Hambantota areas, there was near equal engagement of women and men. The socio-cultural context (Sinhala/Tamil Catholic and Sinhala Buddhist ethno-religious groups respectively) in these areas, it is more open to women engaging in work outside the home.
- The majority of medium/large-scale processors in Kalpitiya, Trincomalee and Jaffna areas are men, due to a socio-cultural context (Muslim and Tamil Hindu ethno-religious groups) which confines women to the private sphere. Female family members may help males by preparing food and tea, or processing in the compound of the house.

- Women are engaging in de-heading, degutting, de-scaling as well as salting, laying on racks, turning upside down, drying, and storing of small pelagic fish spp.
- In contrast, men engagement is higher on large pelagic fish processing, especially for de-heading, degutting, de-scaling, de-skinning (sea chicken), washing and salting.
- Drying and storing is mostly done by women





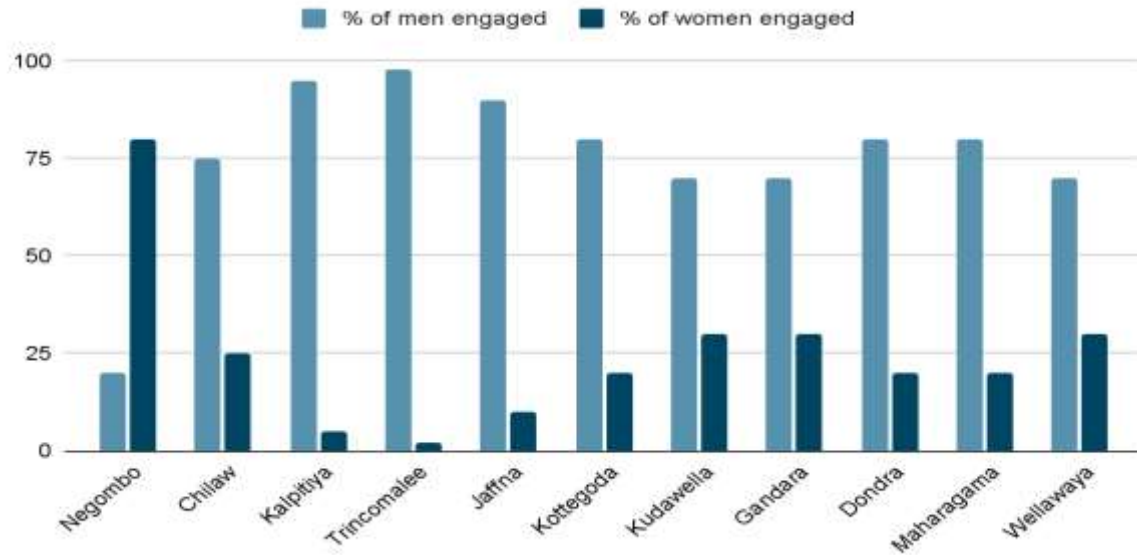
Wage rates for male and female workers in different areas

Region	Permanent labour (LKR/month)		Temporary labour (LKR/day)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Kalpitiya	25,000-30,000	45,000	1200	1750- 2000
Negombo	n/r	n/r	1000-1200	1000-1500
Matara	n/r	n/r	2000	2500
Jaffna	n/r	n/r	1000	2000
Trincomalee	n/r	n/r	n/r	2000

n/r = not relevant

- Permanent workers are hired only in Kalpitiya, to prevent labour shortages during production.
- Men received higher wage than women due to a perception of being involved in heavier work especially in large pelagic dried fish production; typically many women work in the small pelagic dried fish production, men are perceived to have more experience and skills, based on gender norms and beliefs (sometimes owners give tips to their male workers)
- In Matara, many processors processed Maldive fish, while in other regions they produced dried fish
 - Number of working hours and gender roles are different between Maldive fish and dried fish production. Therefore, the wage rate for women is twice as high in Matara, as in other regions.

Gendered engagement in dried fish trading



- In the medium- to small-scale dried fish traders in Negombo area, women's participation was highest than all other study areas.
- The majority of medium/large-scale traders in Kalpitiya, Trincomalee and Jaffna areas are men, due to a socio-cultural context (Muslim and Tamil Hindu ethno-religious groups) which restricts women to the home and personal space.
- In Matara and Hambantota areas, Chilaw, Maharagama and Wellawaya engagement of women was significant due to the socio-cultural context in these areas is more receptive to women engaging in work outside the home.
- The engagement of women is mainly limited to the wife (who serves as the cashier). Other female members of the household or community are sometimes engaged in packing and weighing.

Dried fish trading: Gender division of labour

Market types	Selling type (Wholesale/ Retail)	Gender engagement	Activities
National market (Colombo)	Only Wholesaling	Dominated by men (100%) ; many traders are Muslim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sorting and grading • Loading and unloading crates of dried fish from vehicles • Packaging and weighing
Regional market (Negombo - Kamachchodaya)	Wholesaling and retailing	Dominated by women traders (80%); many traders are Sinhalese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sorting and grading • Occasionally women assist in loading and unloading crates of dried fish • Packaging and weighing
Local market	Wholesaling and retailing Wellawaya area only retailing	** Both men and women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sorting and grading • Occasionally, women assist in loading and unloading crates of dried fish • Further value-adding tasks (cleaning, de-heading and additional drying) • Packaging and weighing

(based on fieldwork data)

** Kalpitiya, Trincomalee and Jaffna have few women traders and buyers in the markets, due to cultural constraints that confine women to the private sphere and restrict mobility outside the home.



Value additions

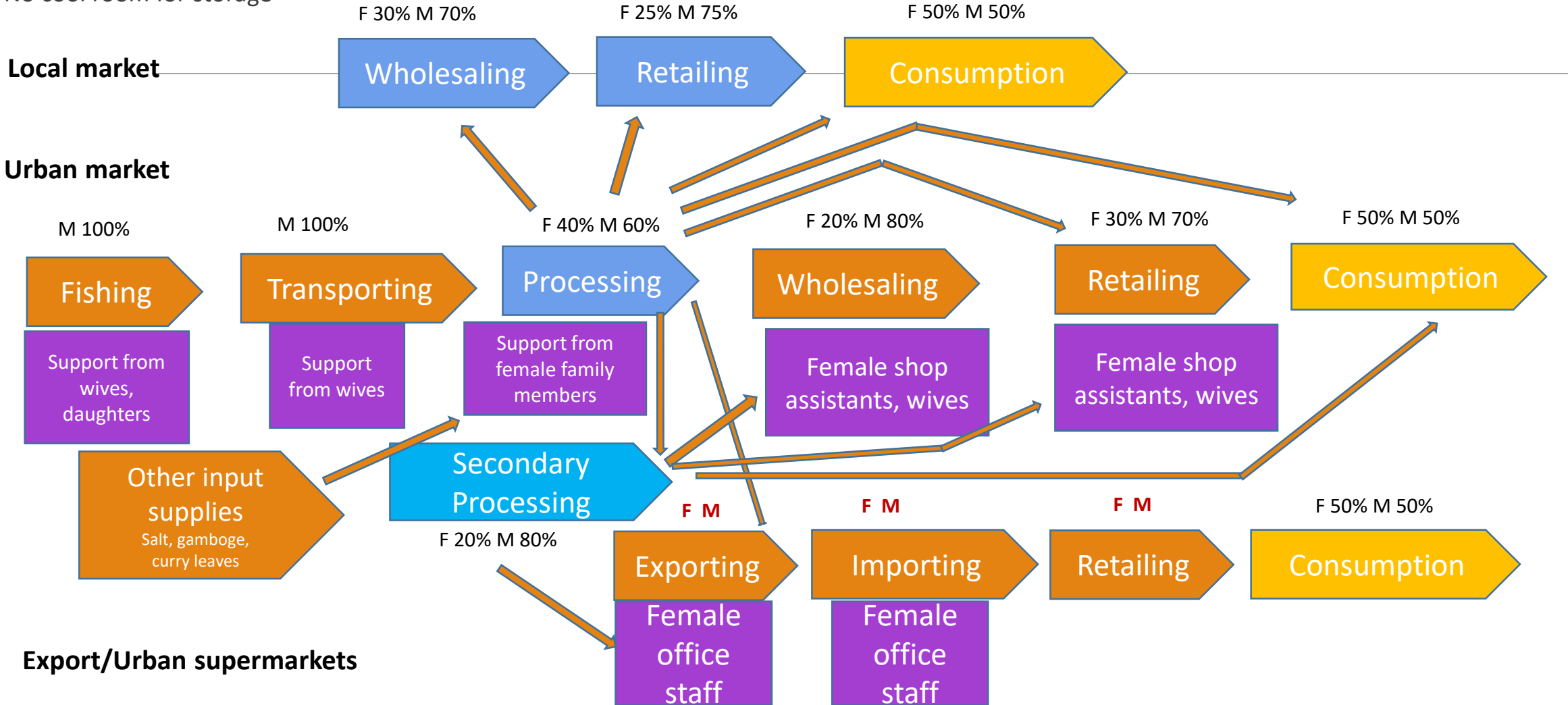
- Both women and men are engaged in sorting and grading activities.
- Cutting, brushing, de-heading (sprats),
- Men assist women in packaging and weighing, load and unload crates of dried fish from vehicles
- Occasionally, women assist in loading and unloading the crates of dried fish.





Gendered engagement in dried fish production

No cool room for storage



Conclusion

- Fish processing and trading is gendered; women representation depends on the scale of operation, culture, length and segment of the value chain
- Women contribution is significant at the lower stream of the value chain where men's contribution is dominant at the upper streams
- Shorter value chains with lesser value additions are practiced by women in rural areas
- A significant pay-gap is noticeable between men and women workers

