

Research Paper

Women Fish Processors in Cambodia: Challenges for Collective Business

KYOKO KUSAKABE*

Gender and Development Studies, School of Environment, Resources and Development Asian
Institute of Technology, Klong Luang, Pathumthani 12120, Thailand

Abstract

One of the ways that small-scale fish processors are able to improve their position in the value chain is to get organised. However, there are many limitations for women fish processors to do so. By analysing the situation of women fish processors in Battambang, Cambodia, the study found that the reasons women have difficulty in organising collective business are not only the characteristics of resources (fluctuating and diminishing supply of fish) or user groups (and women's time poverty) but the gender power relations that make it impossible for women traders to work collectively. The particular nature of product and market make women processors dependent on Thai traders. Hence they compete rather than cooperate to sell to the Thai market, under the absence of any support to collectively negotiate and improve their position in the value chain.

Introduction

Fish processing is one of the occupations where women are heavily concentrated, especially in small-scale enterprises. However, there are many limitations that women entrepreneurs face including barriers in access to capital and technology (Siddiqui 2012; Mayoux 2001). One of the ways to overcome such limitation is to organise themselves into a community enterprise, cooperative, or joint enterprise (Jones et al. 2012; Bernard and Spielman 2009). However, despite all the advantages of cooperatives/collective business, it has not become a dominant form of enterprise among women fish processors in Cambodia. This paper explores the particular nature of the commodity chain

*Corresponding author. Email address: kyokok@ait.asia

and the product to find out why women entrepreneurs have not been successful in working together in fish processing enterprises within the particular context of Cambodia.

Women small-scale enterprises

There is a direct relationship between women's independent income and their empowerment, a factor that emphasises the importance of support for women's enterprises (Chen et al. 2004; Singh 2012; Kabeer 2012). There is, however, considerable debate over whether women's independent income through their own enterprises also increases women's bargaining power vis-à-vis men and other members within the family. The relationship between economic independence and women's position in the household is complicated (Kabeer 2012). In Mali, women's participation in shea cooperatives contributed to better recognition and higher respect from men in the community as well as the authorities (Oxfam 2013). In contrast, in South Asia, women are reluctant to utilise their economic power to improve their status, fearing it might offend their husbands and prompt them to leave (James 2012). Although there might not be a direct link between women's independent income and women's empowerment, there is little doubt that better access to and control over resources and assets boosts women's self-confidence and increases their options.

Women-owned enterprises often remain small and face various limitations, including lack of access to credit and production technology; lack of education, labour, formal job experience, self-confidence, market information and networks, time and mobility, representation and visibility; difficulty in juggling between productive and reproductive work; as well as gender discrimination in the market and legal formalities (Siddiqui 2012; Singh 2012; Mayoux 2001; Kuada 2009). Women producers have weaker bargaining power with buyers and occupy less profitable sectors of the economy (Jones et al. 2012). Women often earn less economic return for their efforts when compared to men (Chen et al. 2004).

Various kinds of support have been provided to women's small businesses, such as micro-credit and training. One of the most effective ways to support women's enterprises is to organise them into groups in order to enhance

their ability to gain access to resources and achieve better terms of trade (Peterson 2014, Jones et al. 2012; Hassan et al. 2013 and Bernard and Spielman 2009). The advantage of organising women's enterprises into associations is that it brings women's voices and representation to the attention of policy makers, and helps women gain access to business development services (Vandenberg 2006). Women's groups can gain attention from external donors and improve their access to resources (Peterson 2014), and by working together, women producers can achieve economies of scale and also negotiate for support from local authorities (Jones et al. 2012).

However, marketing cooperatives do not always work positively for their members. Based on a review of literature on collective action in natural resources management, Markelova et al. (2009) identified three factors that are important for collective action: characteristics of resources, characteristics of user groups, and institutional arrangements. They further argued that the degree of predictability, mobility, storage of resources and technologies are important variables, and that perishable and high-value products with higher returns can better offset the cost of organising for collective action. Strong leadership and governance by democratic principles are crucial characteristics of successful users' or producers' groups, a view supported by Jones et al. (2012). Institutional arrangements are important. For example, in the case of Mali's shea cooperatives, favourable government policies which encouraged the formation of women's groups and cooperatives, and the 2006 agricultural orientation law which addressed the issue of gender equality, both strengthened women's collective actions (Oxfam 2013).

This paper follows the Markelova et al. (2009) review of collective action in natural resource management to analyse the case of Cambodian women processed fish traders. According to their classification, Cambodian processed-fish traders have fulfilled most of the factors that would facilitate collectivity, including (i) fish is a perishable and high-value commodity and (ii) the government provides some support to encourage formation of collectives. By such accounts, collectivisation should be beneficial to traders, and yet the efforts towards collectivisation have not been successful. This paper examines why processed fish traders in Battambang, Cambodia do not work collectively though it is supposedly more beneficial for them to work together.

Materials and Methods

This paper is based on a series of interviews with fish processors in Battambang province in Cambodia in January 2013. The paper draws from a larger research project on fish border trade in Cambodia. In 2012-2013, we interviewed 46 respondents (32 women traders, 10 men traders and 4 couple traders). Among these interviewees were fish paste (*prahok*) producers/traders, who used to be in one company, but have now divided into three. We have interviewed all these three companies (4 women, 2 men). The information below is largely from the in-depth interviews with these three companies. All the names used are pseudonyms.

Results

Fish processing in Cambodia

Although everyone agrees on the importance of fisheries for the Cambodian economy, it is difficult to get an exact and consistent figure with respect to the production and export of fish and fish products. In 2008, total fish production (both inland and marine) in Cambodia was reported at 527,000 tonnes in 2008 valued at 1.2 to 1.6 billion USD, employing 6 million people (40% of the population) full time and part time (Golub and Varma 2014). Most of the fish supply is from freshwater, amounting to 422,000 tonnes of the 527,000 tonnes (Golub and Varma 2014). Although fisheries are seen as a male occupation, the value chain does not support this concept. Fewer women than men are seen only in the actual catching of the fish. Post-harvest distributions as well as processing are both largely dominated by women. Globally, 47% of all people involved in fisheries are women; in Cambodia, it is 57% (Golub and Varma 2014).

The amount of fish exported from Cambodia peaked in 2004-05, and then gradually decreased, becoming one-sixth of the peak amount by 2008. Surprisingly, recorded fish exports are not large. Only 30,000 tonnes were exported in 2011 according to the Fisheries Administration (FiA) statistics, while the Ministry of Commerce records showed only 1,600 tonnes (Golub and Varma 2014).

According to Seang Tana and Todd (2002) (cited in Fisheries Administration 2009), freshwater fish are marketed as fresh fish (57%), fish paste (*prahok*) (19.6%), salt dried (9%), smoked (5.7%), sun dried (4%), fermented (2.9%). In the year 2000, the Department of Fisheries recorded that 33,751 tonnes of fish were processed, and 18,140 tonnes (54%) of it was exported (<http://www.mekonginfo.org/assets/midocs/0003355-farming-trade-marketing-and-processing-of-fisheries-and-fisheries-product-review.pdf>_Accessed 14 April 2015). Chun Sophal (2010) in *Phnom Penh Post* (<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/fish-exports-climb-30m-concerns-grow-over-stock>_accessed 14 April 2015) reported that in 2010, Cambodia exported 10,000 tonnes of processed fish. This paper focuses on freshwater fish processing, specifically on fish paste (*prahok*) producers. *Prahok* is a salted and fermented fish, which is a popular condiment for Khmer cuisine and takes more than three months to produce (Norng et al. 2011).

Fish processing in Tonle Sap Lake area in Cambodia existed even in the pre-colonial period, i.e. before the late 19th century. The freshwater fishers of Tonle Sap not only produced for home consumption, but in the 1960s and 70s, they exported to Thailand as well. During the Pol Pot regime, this activity stopped but revived after the liberation. There was plenty of fish in the Tonle Sap, and since all people around the Tonle Sap Lake were engaged in fish processing, production was high. Initially, they catered to the small domestic market, but with urbanisation and the opening of the border with Thailand, much of the processed fish was sold outside the area. Most of the enterprises in the 1990s and early 2000s were own-account or small-scale individual enterprises in the Tonle Sap area. In 2005-06, Fisheries Administration (FiA) decreed that in each province, only one company would be officially allowed to export processed fish to Thailand. This prompted fish processors to come together to form a company. The purpose of the government was to encourage people to work together and merge capital, so that they would be able to deal with Thai traders as equals. However, organising fish processors did not progress as intended by FiA, and now FiA allows several companies to operate in each province.

The following sections discuss the fish processing groups in Battambang province, Cambodia. Battambang is one of the major provinces for freshwater fish processing. The trajectory of the processors in coming together and then

breaking up is described in detail. Through analysing their experiences, the barriers to collective business in fish processing in Cambodia can be explored.

Fish processing in Battambang

A collective fish processing company was established in 2005, under the direction of FiA. There were eight *prahok* processors (six women and two men) in the province, and all of them came together to form one joint company. They gathered all the produce from all members in a common place, and then, supplied each of the members' regular customers in turn.

Before the company was formed, one of the main problems faced by fish processors was the lack of regular suppliers of fish. Fish processors need to give advance payment to suppliers to ensure that they get enough fish. With harsh competition and fluctuation in fish catch, lack of regular supply of fish was a key constraint for fish processors. With the establishment of the company, processors gained access to more capital, and with that, they were able to offer advance payment to suppliers, thereby acquiring a steady supply of fish as well as a larger quantity of fish from a larger number of suppliers.

But they had problems when they were selling to their customers. Before forming a company, each processor already had his/her regular customers. Maintaining relations with regular customers is very important for processors, since this is key to their business stability. Initially, members did not have any problem in sharing regular customers with each other. At that time, they were trading around 8,000 tonnes per year. One of the members said that she was able to double her business after joining the company. However, some members started to feel that eight people were too many to manage, and in 2006, the company split into two with four members each – Company A (four women members) and Company B (two women, two men members). After the split, the amount of fish traded by the companies decreased and Company A said that it went down to 2,000 tonnes. Sophea, Sokha, Jaria and Theary were members in Company A and did not have large capital, so they were not able to keep their capital with the company throughout the year. They divided their profit once a year during the New Year, and returned all the investment to each member. They bought as much fish as possible during the fishing season and built up stocks so that they could continue to process fish during the closed

season (June to September). However, their business slows down during the closed season as their stocks are not large enough.

Company A used to sell to three Thai traders. But in 2008, they decided to select only one, since it was too difficult to keep meeting the demands of all the three and maintain good relationships all around. As Sokha mentioned, it is better to stick to one customer, since other Thai traders might not make payments.

The Cambodians felt that it was difficult to find a sincere Thai trader who would not cheat them and who would pay regularly. Cambodian processors' bargaining power vis-a-vis Thai traders is weak, and their major concern is not the low profit margin but whether or not they can get paid. Therefore, it is crucial for fish processors to have a close relationship with Thai traders.

In 2009, Sophea split from Company A and started to operate on her own, because of conflict over management styles. In the same year, Sophea married off her daughter to the adopted son of the Thai trader, and monopolised the sales of processed fish, which made it impossible for the other three members (Sokha, Jaria, and Theary) to sell to this trader. So, the three had to go back to the two Thai traders with whom they severed relations in 2008, and resume sales with one of them. While Sophea was able to export more than 1,000 tonnes in 2011, Company A with the other three lost USD 80,000. This made life difficult for Sokha, Jaria and Theary of Company A, and they had to develop other income sources outside the company. As Jaria says:

It is difficult to do business here, since there is too much competition.

As for Company B, after the split with Company A, they needed to borrow USD 50,000 from the bank, since they did not have enough capital to buy fish. Company B has a woman president and a woman vice president, and the two factory managers are men (since men members are minor shareholders). Company B is operated by all the four members, but business was not good and they incurred a loss of USD 10,000 in 2011.

It is noted that both Companies A and B are run by women. Fish trade is considered women's work. Men help in business, since the business is

profitable and needs considerable labor; but still fish trade remains women's business. Some women are able to expand their business. But the social status of fish business is not high – it is considered hard, smelly and insignificant business run by women as a secondary income for the family, despite the fact that in many households, women are the main breadwinners. Due to such attitudes, women fish processors are unable to wield much political clout and negotiation power with authorities. Women face multiple problems in running such businesses, but collective business is still not their first option. In order to understand better why collective business did not work out in Battambang, below, we examine the personal trajectory of three members of Company A in detail.

Sophea (former Company A member)

Sophea's education was stopped in 1986, and she started to help her mother in processing fish. She got married in 1990, and started her own business selling processed fish as a wholesaler. She started exporting to Thailand in 2005. She is a large trader, selling more than 50 trucks with 20-30 tonnes per transaction to the border town of Poipet. She buys semi-processed *prahok* (head and intestines removed and lightly salted) and completes the final processing at her place, since salting requires good technique.

She joined the company in 2005 and was able to access even larger capital to expand the business. However, she had difficulty in working with many people. She is used to running the business independently and making business decisions alone, so she felt that consulting with other partners was cumbersome and led to a loss of business opportunities. Once she had an order of 100 tonnes and she managed the sales alone without discussing them with others. Other members were very angry and hence Sophea decided to withdraw her capital from the company and continue to do business alone. She also wanted to give priority to her regular customer, which other members did not agree to, so it was not possible for her to work with others.

She has a very close relationship with her Thai customer. When she does business, she can borrow money from a private exchange service in Battambang provincial center. The Thai customer sends payment to this exchange in Thai currency, and she receives the money in Cambodian currency. The transaction

fee is lower than that at the bank. She can also get money in advance a few days, since the exchange service knows that payment is sure to come from Thailand. Such an arrangement allows her to conduct business without any significant loans from the bank.

Her husband is an alcoholic and she needs to keep him in a rehabilitation center from time to time, so she runs the business all by herself. This is a disappointment for her, since when she got married, he was an employee of a factory and she expected that she would be able to depend on his income. Her dreams of being a full-time housewife did not materialise, and now she concentrates on her business. She elaborated on her frustrations with her husband as follows:

I want to divorce him, but he said that if I am to divorce him, I have to leave the house. It is difficult to be a woman..... I am not able to go to Poipet myself, since my husband gets jealous..... I feel tired, but I cannot quit my business because I still have children to support.

Her first daughter was married in 2009 to the adopted son of her Thai regular customer. This made it easier for her to solidify her relationship with the Thai customer, and also made it easier to get advance payment from the Thai customer. Her second daughter was married to a Cambodian businessman, but based on her experience Sophea believes it is not good to depend on the husband, so she is planning to start up a salt business for her daughter to run.

In order to do business, she has to fight with authorities, but she has so far been successful in negotiating, not by working collectively with other processors but by complaining and dealing with government officers individually. For example, in Battambang province, as part of the city planning exercise, provincial officers tried to move the trading place of processed fish and also to charge fish processors a business operation fees similar to that being charged to fresh fish traders. She and other processors complained to the province and they were successful in removing the collection of fees. However, the complaints were raised individually, as she said:

I often argue with officers or go to negotiate with the higher ranked officers in the province when I face irrational demands. So the officers say that I am a “pathakham batbao” (protestor).

With sound financial backing from her Thai customer, she is able to purchase fish from various provinces all year round. Thus, she has enough fish to continue processing at full capacity even during the closed season, unlike other members of Company A. At the same time, her experience in negotiation with authorities is that individual negotiation works and collective negotiation is unnecessary. Hence she has very little motivation to work with others.

Sokha (Company A)

Sokha's husbands as well as her parents-in-laws were all large scale fishers. She initially was fishing with her husband, but later started her own fish processing business in 1980. Her mother-in-law was also working in fish processing. Since 1986, Sokha has sent processed fish to Poipet to sell to Thailand. In 2004, she traded only 5 to 10 tonnes per day. When Sokha joined the Company in 2005, she was able to double her production and could trade 10 to 20 tonnes per day (sometimes 30 to 40 tonnes). Although she is still working with Jaria and Theary in Company A, even after Sophea left and set up her own business, she expressed difficulty in working with others:

It is easier to do business alone. Also, the Thai customers become confused, since they cannot order directly from us personally like before. In theory, it is good to work as a company, but in reality, it does not work like that.

Jaria (Company A)

Since 1983-1984, Jaria's mother has carried out fish business at the market, and Jaria took over the business from her mother. She married a school teacher in 1990 and expanded her processed fish wholesale business in 1995. In 1997, her husband quit his teaching job and started to help her in the business. In 2000, she further expanded the business but limited her expansion as she did not want to borrow money from the bank. She also expresses difficulty in working collectively:

Company is difficult when there are a lot of shareholders, since we cannot agree with each other.

But at the same time, she sees the merit in working together:

I think it is better to have one company per province. Now, there is no way for us to ensure that the Thai traders will pay up when we sell on credit. Since Cambodian traders are competing with each other, Thai traders can take advantage of that and not pay. If Cambodian traders are united, we can pressure Thai traders to pay up.

What we can see from Sophea, Sokha and Jaria's cases are that each of them had experience in running a fairly large business independently. Such experience and confidence made them feel that it is more difficult to work together than do business alone. The key factor that helped Sophea to break off independently, while Sokha and Jaria remained with the Company, was that Sophea was able to secure her market by building a strong relationship with a large Thai customer.

Discussion

Markelova et al. (2009) identified three factors important for collective action in natural resources management: characteristics of resources, user groups and institutional arrangements. This paper used this classification to analyse whether these factors apply to processed fish traders. Characteristics of resources are examined through a discussion of how fish as a product affects collective action. Characteristics of user groups are discussed through an analysis of the company members, and institutional arrangements reviewed include government support and the processors' relationship with Thai buyers.

Fish as a product

Does the particular characteristic of fish as a product facilitate Cambodian freshwater fish processors to work collectively? There are several characteristics of processed fish in Cambodia. One is that it is seasonal. Fish for *prahok* is available only for 3-4 months a year, and if one cannot stock enough fish for the whole year, the business can run only for half a year. That is the case for Sokha, Jaria and Theary in Company A and all members in Company

B, but Sophea was able to buy enough fish to last for the whole year thanks to her sound financial backing due to her relationship with the Thai trader.

The second characteristic is the diminishing resources and price fluctuation. As respondents said, the price of freshwater fish is very volatile in Cambodia. Respondents also said that freshwater fish availability in Tonle Sap Lake has decreased since 2009. Further, FiA (2009) data shows that fish production peaked in 2004/2005 and, since then, it has been gradually decreased. Therefore, processors need to compete for scarce fish resources. The third characteristic is that fish is extremely perishable. Markelova et al. (2009) concluded that perishable but high-value products are best suited for collective marketing, as the high returns can offset the organising costs. For such products, transaction costs become higher because of transportation and marketing, and working collectively can reduce such costs. Fish in Tonle Sap Lake is a perishable and high-value product, but Cambodian traders are not able to take advantage of this nature of the product, because of other factors as discussed below.

Characteristics of the group members

Women fish processors in Companies A and B were engaged in fish processing business individually on a fairly large scale even before they came together to form a company. Frocklin et al. (2013) said that women do not have access to high value fish and profitable markets, due to women's reproductive roles. Near the Tonle Sap, Cambodia, women processors tend to have less capital, and hence they also have lower access to fish. Therefore, initially, coming together to form companies was beneficial for all the respondents we interviewed. The joint company boosted their capital and they could buy much more fish than when they were doing it alone. However, the nature of their relationship with Thai customers as well as the volatile fish market did not allow them to continue with such collectivisation. Because fish supply is so volatile and because there are very few Thai traders, especially reliable Thai traders accessible at the border, Cambodian processors were extremely dependent on a small number of Thai buyers. As seen in Company A, conflict between processors over their regular Thai customers caused the breakdown of the joint companies.

Women entrepreneurs have no formal or informal support for their business and have to do business in a volatile market without any protection. For survival, they need at least one reliable factor, and the only reliable factor is the Thai buyer. This is unfortunate and ironic, since these very Thai buyers dominate the value chain and determine the unequal terms of trade, which causes considerable suffering to the Cambodian traders. This fact was also noted by fresh fish traders who were also called to form associations. However, no association of fresh fish traders have been formed. As one fresh fish trader, who attended a meeting organised by FiA regarding forming an association with other fish traders, noted:

The most important part of any trade is regular customers. Trade depends completely on this. The regular customer in Thailand will set the price, but she makes sure that I will also have some profit.... Everyone wants to keep good relations with their own customers, so there were conflicts regarding which customer will be given priority.

Institutional arrangements

The Fisheries Administration (FiA), aside from organising meetings, provided training and advice to support fish processors' joint companies. For example, FiA advised fish processors to put *prahok* in containers labeled with the name of the company as part of a marketing and branding strategy and for quality assurance. However, this was not successful. The Thai customers wanted to buy only fish (and not the container). So, after one year, the fish processors stopped packaging and branding *prahok*.

Other than such sporadic advice and suggestions, there is no other government support for fish processors. There is no quality control or support to improve the quality of *prahok*. As one member of Company B said:

There is no differentiation in price according to quality of prahok. All prahok are sold at the same price.

The lack of support from FiA or other domestic organisations makes it difficult for fish processors to improve their income except through creating stronger linkages with the Thai traders. This is done through increased communication with Thai traders and accommodating each and every demand

of the Thai traders, such as how much to sell, when, and at what price and quality. Such dependence on Thai traders is further strengthened since the number of buyers and the number of markets for *prahok* is quite limited. Again, the member of Company B said:

It is not possible to sell to Phnom Penh, since the demand is not enough. The price in Phnom Penh is the same as that in Thailand, but we do not take the prahok to Phnom Penh as the market is too small. Since the price is the same, it is actually less expensive to transport goods to Phnom Penh [since there is no need to pay fees at the border]. Though it is more profitable to sell domestically, the quantity we can sell is too limited. Therefore, domestic retail price [of prahok] is higher than the retail price in Thailand.

Markelova et al. (2009) argued that perishable goods are more suitable for collective action. However, fluctuating prices, decreasing supply of fish combined with limited markets, a heavy dependence on Thai traders, and lack of government support discouraged fish processors from coming together as a collective. Through experience, women processors found that the business is more stable if they have support from Thai traders, rather than from each other.

We argue that it is not only the characteristics of resources or user groups but the power relations including gender power relations that make it impossible for women traders to work collectively. Barham and Chitemi's (2009) study on Tanzania farmer groups showed that higher female ratios in leadership showed weaker performance, since women did not have enough time to invest in looking for new markets. Cambodian processed fish traders similarly suffer from time poverty that restricts their market channels and their power to negotiate with others.

As Jones et al. (2012) noted, collective actions are important for women, who have few resources, to develop their business. Casual observation leads to the perception that fish processing can be a good sector to organise for collective business, especially since it fulfills at least two of the three factors that Markelova et al. (2009) flagged as important for collective action – characteristics of product and institutional arrangements. Fish is a perishable commodity, a key product characteristic for collective action. The Cambodian

government's policy to facilitate collective business fulfills the requirement for institutional arrangements.

However, a closer look into their business shows that the businesses did not have a good leader to organise them or set up a functional governance body, i.e., they did not fulfill the key factor in the characteristics of user groups as listed by Markelova et al. (2009). Further, although the government policy supported women's enterprises to collectivise, the support was sporadic and did not make much impact. The instability and unpredictability of fish supply coupled with the diminishing fish supply made fish processors feel extremely insecure in their business, and therefore, increased their dependence on Thai traders. Thus, they saw little merit in working together, given the severe competition to secure fish supply and meet the demands of the customer. Therefore, though fish processors are a good target for collective business at first glance, the nature and circumstances of the business is not conducive for collectivisation.

However, we further observe a key factor missing in the analysis by Markelova et al. (2009). An analysis of power relations within the household and in the commodity chain will reveal the difficulties women traders face in coming together as a formal collective organisation. By looking at gender relations in the household and commodity chain, we can develop a more nuanced understanding of their business. For example, fish as a product is relevant not only because it is perishable and unpredictable (in terms of supply), but also because it allows us to understand the involvement of women and their way of operating the business. Cambodian women processed fish traders, because of the particular nature and image of the product, are able to wield considerable control over their business. As seen in the cases, fish business is often passed on from mother to daughter. The business requires human connections which are developed over several years of relationship and market route building, rather than land or other property. Therefore, it is important for women to pass down social capital for fish business to their daughters. This explains why women processors highly prioritised their relations with Thai traders. It is such connections that are the most valued business asset.

At the same time, the dependence of women fish processors on Thai traders also reflects their inability to develop alternative markets. Women's time

poverty in managing both the household and business (given the absence of involvement from men in both spaces) aggravates the situation. Women do not have time to go and explore markets, as Barham and Chitemi (2009) noted in their research in Tanzania. Sophea mentioned three reasons to explain why she does not go to the border market by herself anymore: (1) other people tell her husband that it is not good to let a woman go to Poipet alone, which makes him jealous; (2) there is no one to look after the family; (3) she is afraid that she will lose some regular customers who come to her house to buy. Her gender roles, her relationship with her husband as well as gender norms bind her to the house and make it difficult for her to travel around and develop new markets.

Conclusions

Analysing the reasons why women fish processors in Battambang, Cambodia had difficulty in organising collective business, we found three key areas: (i) the fluctuating and diminishing supply of fish; (ii) the dependence on Thai traders; and (iii) lack of government support to collectively negotiate and improve their position in the value chain. Further, the study also pointed out that gender norms attach fish-related businesses to women creating a certain value to women's fish business, thus making social capital the most important asset to be protected and passed on to their daughters. Gender norms and roles also place women in a sedentary position creating barriers in the search for further markets. It is important to analyse the power relations that are embedded in women entrepreneurs' daily lives, and the support/resources that they have, in order to organise women entrepreneurs in ways that can change social and familial power relations for their benefit.

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