

The women of Petatán, a fish-processing village in Lake Chapala, Mexico

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Background



- Petatán is a fishing village bordering Lake Chapala, the largest lake in Mexico.
- Most fish caught in the lake and in other water bodies in the region is processed here.
- Petatán houses the second largest fish processing industry in the region, and the fish filleted here goes to the second largest fish market in the country.
- There is not arable land because the community is located between the lake and the mountain.

Research objective

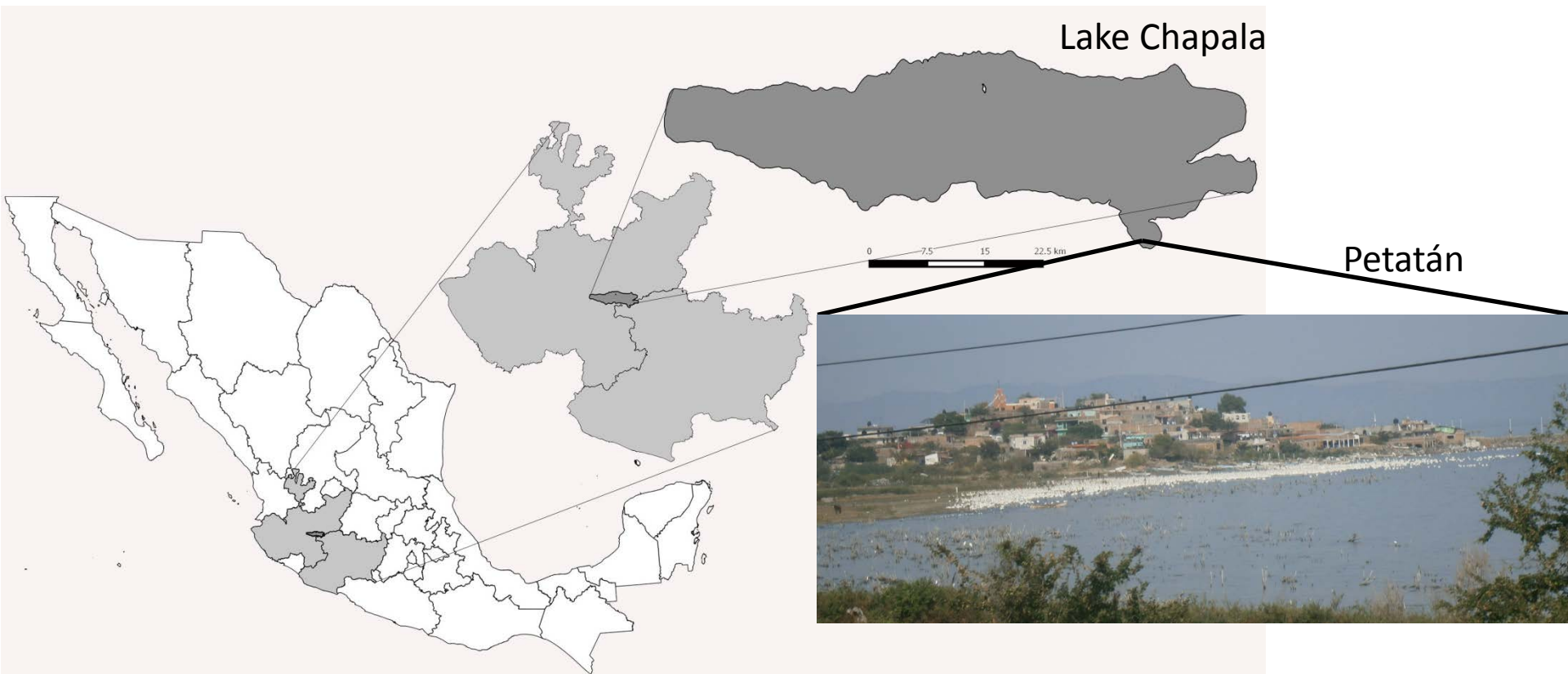
- Considering a gender perspective the paper **explores the socioeconomic importance of women processing activities** for the local fishing industry and the household survival.



Methodological approach

- The research design was mainly qualitative and explorative, however some quantitative data was obtained to show the socioeconomic impact of the activity.
- An interview tool, based on semi-structured interviews, was developed to find out the general situation of women's work. About 35 women were interviewed in their working places, and 3 key informants from the community.
- Fieldwork was carried out during 2015.

Location



Petatan's main characteristics

- Petatán is a small peninsula located in Lake Chapala. It was a former island when water levels were higher and a fishers refuge or camping site.
- It has a population of 423 inhabitants, 203 men and 217 women. 93% of men and women know how to read and write, but they have only reached 5th grade of primary education.
- 74% of men are fishers and 78% of women fillet fish.



Results

The goods and the bads about
women filleting work

Features in women's work: health

- Long hours of standing without eating. Women working hours are between **5 and 13** hours per day. Their salary is paid by piece-rate. Each Kg= 0.2 USD
- Women go to work whenever fish is available. They do not have any formal training.
- They do not have social security, or any type of medical care in case of any illness or accidents. There is not any medical doctor or pharmacy in the community.



Features on women's work: Children work

- Children participation on the filleting of fish is common. Girls learn how to fillet when they are **between 9 and 11 years old**.
- They do it sometimes to pay for recreation activities or to help their families.
- Or maybe just to spend some time with **their mothers**.



Features in women's work: organization

- Inexistence of women **cooperatives** or any type of organization
- There are no working benefits the job is **completely informal**
- **They are force to work in the place where their husbands sell their fish,** otherwise local intermediaries will not buy their husband's catch.



Fish processing conditions

Fish is processed under poor hygiene conditions



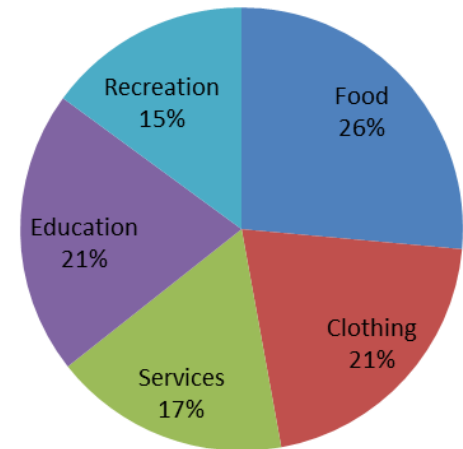
Why do they do this job?

- “If you want to carry money in your pocket you have to learn how to fillet fish” (Amparo Castellanos)
- “If we work we do not mind if our husband wants to leave us because we have our own money” (Diana Medina)
- “This is what we always have done and we do not know how to do other things” (Faby Rodríguez).
- “We are known as the bravest women around the region because we earn money”
- “We can pay for our children to go to school”



Earnings and income distribution

- Earnings are between 12 and 23 USD per day.
- Minimum wage in Mexico is 4 USD per day.
- Women's household contribution range between 25% and 100%. Depending on their husband catch.
- In Petatán people eat fish from the lake about 5 days per week.



Women's work contributions

- Women's income is in more regular bases than men. There is always fish to fillet but not always fish to fish.
- Women feel that it is a **reliable job** because there is always fish to fillet.
- They have a saying in household decision making.
- Positive impact on local economy
- Fisheries value chain = value addition specially because local fish is considered a poor quality fish.
- In general every household have enough to eat and to cover other basic need such as basic education and clothing.
- About 70% of the interviewed women affirmed that they can go to holidays once a year to the seaside.



Final remarks

- **Research** in Mexico about women's participation in fisheries is limited and even more in inland fisheries.
- **Geographic isolation** limits the people from Petatán participating in other economic activities, but at the same time not even young people wants to leave the community to go to work in other places. They are also discourage to **follow further education** because people say “why to study more if you are going to end up filleting fish”.
- Petatan's economy is **highly** dependent on the fishing activity.
- Fishers cooperatives are only men's territory and only fishermen receive governmental funding.
- **Intermediaries** have total control over the fisheries value chain in Patatán, and the local economy.
- Women's role is crucial for the FVC and places them at a central role in the household and local economy.
- Without **women's work** household income will be substantially affected because fishers won't be able to sell their catch and women wouldn't receive money to help to support their homes.
- Training in women's work will benefit the whole FVC and a women cooperative might improve their working conditions.

Acknowledgments

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**All the people the supported me to be here
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Thank you for your attention

