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Sustainability of Malekhu Fish Eatery Market: Questions for New Generation

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Malekhu is a small town situated along the Prithivi Highway in Nepal; for years, this place has been considered a city of fish enthusiasts, as the local economy was based on the firm ground of selling river fish. The proximity to the Trishuli River allowed its inhabitants to establish a vibrant market for fish and add a series of restaurants along the road. However, with the increasing demand by consumers for fish that is now increasingly met by the pond-raised variety, there is a **risk to the authenticity** of Malekhu fish products. Smoking and drying fish, for instance, have been in practice from earlier times and are now made more complex by environmental factors and increased costs in maintaining hygiene for such products. Either way, the processors and sellers are having hard time with unproportionally demands.



Figure 1: Sun drying fishes

This poster looks into the multi-dimensional dynamics shaping today's fish market in Malekhu. These are contrasted by the less expensive but presumably inferior in taste pond fish-whose dependence is seen to be on an increase. Naini and Rohu fishin particular, from the nearest Terai districts such as Chitwan, Bara, Dhanusa, Birgunj, and others, are the major resource for this hub. The **decline in the population** of fish, added to the environmental challenges (flood, landslide, droughts, etc.) brought forth by **climate change**, complicates livelihoods even further for local fishermen.



Figure 2: Indian fishermen mending net

Also, the **involvement of foreign labor**, especially Indian fishermen, has been changing the cultural landscape of the fishing community and raising questions of sustainability and local participation. Despite these hardships, no one is willing to control the “**overfishing**” using **destructive gears** in the rivers. Even though everyone is cautious, no law is able to protect the exploited creatures or their habitat. No campaigns or programs have been conducted to assess or to protect the endangered aquatic resources, which is leading to loss of livelihood of fishing community in Malekhu region. Every low catch is a warning sign to a greater collapse!

Despite these issues, Malekhu still holds an important place within Nepal's fish market, though this path ahead is beset with many woes, ranging from illegal fishing practices to potential reputational damage due to poor hygiene standards. This poster represents the current status of the Malekhu fish market, which reveals urgent needs for sustainable use and more regulations to ensure its future sustainability. The poster raises some critical questions toward the future of Malekhu and its fishing-based economy: "How long will the Malekhu market survive under the continuous environmental and economic pressures?".