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ASSESSMENT OF SMALL SCALE FISHERS' LIVELIHOOD STATUS IN THE BATTICALOA DISTRICT OF SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to assess the livelihood status of small-scale fishers in the Batticaloa district of Sri Lanka. Primary data were collected through the structured questionnaire from the selected fishing villages in the Batticaloa district. The study reveals that most of the small-scale fishers were belonged to the age group of 25- 40 and Average family size of fishing households was found to be 4.08. Majority of the fishers are male and they had educated up to primary level (1-5 grade). Around 61 % of fishers earn income less than 10,000 SLR per month and 81 % of the respondents reported that the income is not sufficient to meet their basic demands. The study shows that 91% of the sample households has own houses with sanitation facilities and 25 % of households reported that they have full set of equipments for fishing. The study also shows that the 9% of the respondent has no land to organize alternative livelihood activities and 87% of respondent households are active members in fishery co-operative union. Lack of understanding about well established patterns of livelihood and diversification in fishing communities were the important issues in the study area. A dynamic multi dimension livelihood project should be implemented for the betterments of the fishing households in the study area and trainings on diversified livelihood activities would be organized.

KEYWORDS

Fishermen, fishing community, livelihoods status, socio-economic.

INTRODUCTION

 Small-scale fisheries play an important role in Sri Lankan economy and constitute an integral part of its agriculture sector. This sector provides food security and livelihoods to the rural poor households. Coastal areas in Sri Lanka are very rich in marine resources. It provides many opportunities to the peoples to organize their livelihood and contribute about 1.8% to country's GDP. Batticaloa district of eastern Sri Lanka also has potential fisheries resources. There are 172 fishing villages in the district and 24,720 active fishermen producing 21,850 metric tons of fish in the district. However, fisheries sector in the research area addresses issues on sustainable socio economic improvement of fishing families. Thennakoon (2004) noted that Regional imbalances in socio-economic development exist in Sri Lanka and these imbalances are caused by the availability of resources, level of government development intervention and the variation in physical environment. This situation is also applicable to fisheries sector in the eastern province of Sri Lanka.

As summarized by Kent (1997) small scale fishing is very important to sustainable development of developing countries in the world. According to the Chambers and Conway (1992) livelihood comprise the capabilities, the assets (such as natural, physical, human, financial and Social), the activities and the accesses to these that together determine the living gained by individual household. Fisheries sector in Sri Lanka contributes to livelihood directly as a source of food, income and poverty reduction. However, in some cases, small scale fisheries sector are often neglected in development initiatives. Education (literacy), health and income are very important aspects of socio-economic development of a community. Literacy is basic to the livelihoods. Education helps in gaining of required skill for a job. The education always looked upon as a means of socio-economic improvement of an individual in the society. The fishing communities in the developing countries often face educational disadvantages due to the geographical and social marginalization (FAO, 2006). Similarly, assessment of health status of a community is likewise very important factor to identify the livelihood situation. Household income is another most important factor of the socio-economic status of a community.

The main purpose on the present study is to investigate the livelihood status of small scale fisheries families by exploring the socio economic and fishing features of the research area. Moreover, the present study contributes to the literature as one of the innovative studies in this area and the information gathered through, which may be used to develop appropriate policies to encourage development of the important fisheries sector in the economy of the district. The study expects to generate useful information about the livelihood and socio economics status of small- scale fisheries households in the Batticaloa district. Peoples of the Batticaloa district frequently face natural disasters in the last few years. Because of that they experienced multiple displacements. Due to this situation, most of the small-scales fishing families in the district are in vulnerable level. Considering the situations the study was undertaken to explore the Socio-Economic characteristics of the small- scale fishing households and to examine the livelihood status of small scale fishing communities of Batticaloa District. This study would give feedback and required directions to develop appropriate technologies, planning suitable for the changed scenario. It also provides suitable policy implications for future rehabilitation in the area.

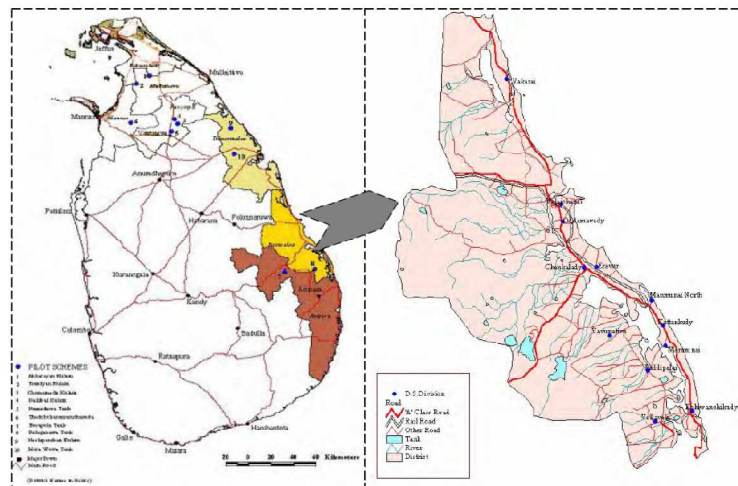
METHOD AND MATERIALS

This study was carried out in the Batticaloa district of Sri Lanka. Batticaloa is one of the three districts in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka, sharing a border with Trincomalee in the north, Pollunaruwa in the west, Ampara in the south, and Indian Ocean in the east. It consists of 14 Divisional Secretariat Divisions and, 348 Grama Niladhari Divisions. Present total population of the district is 596,317. Length of the coast line of the district is 118.8Km. The district consists of 172 fishing villages with 14,283 estimated populations of fishing families. 4682 small scale fishing families are engaged in fishing activities in the district.

DATA COLLECTION

Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. 200 households will be randomly selected from selected fishing villages. The cross sectional data were collected through interview with a structured questionnaire. Focus group discussion and key informant interviews also applied to collect the primary information in the study. This study was conducted in selected fishing villages in the Batticalia district of Eastern Sri Lanka.

FIG. 1: MAP OF THE RESEARCH AREA



Source: District secretariat, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka

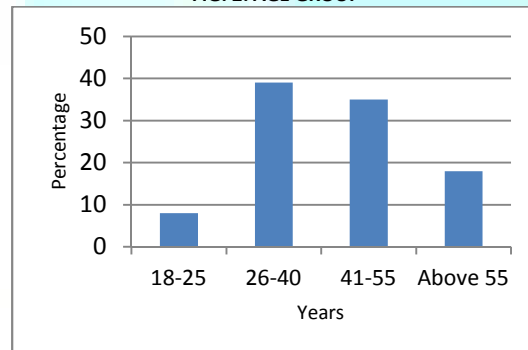
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the livelihood status of small-scale fisheries in the Batticaloa district of Sri Lanka was the main aspect emphasizing on Education, occupation and income, age, family size, housing condition, drinking water facilities, sanitation, and other socio economic issues. Results were presented in the following sections.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Human capital includes Skills, knowledge, age and good health that collectively enable people to pursue different livelihood strategies. Age and the Family size are important socio-economic indicator as it affects the income, food consumption and socio-economic wellbeing of the households (Hossain et.al, 2009). Age structure of fishermen is important in estimating productive human resources. The changing age patterns can strongly affect the growth of human resources. In the present study fishers were grouped into four age groups such as 18-25, 26-40, 41-55 and above 55 year. Among the total sample households in the district 8%, 39%, 35% and 18% belonged to 18-25 years, 26-40 years, 41-55 years and above 55 years respectively. 18-25 and 26-40 years of age groups can be motivated to use their skills and knowledge to improve their livelihood activities. Fig 1 shows the age group of the sample fishermen in the research area. Average family size of fishing households was found to be 4.08. The study also reveals that 22% of the households have less than 3 members, 66% of the households have 3-5 members and 12% of households have more than 5 members. Sex composition is too significant in the livelihood study because both men and women are involved income earning activities at household level. Nevertheless, the present study indicates that the majority of fishers are male among the sample population. 96% respondents are male and only 4% are females those who involve in fishing activities. Females are not directly involved in fishing, but they are the boat owners and being the head of households.

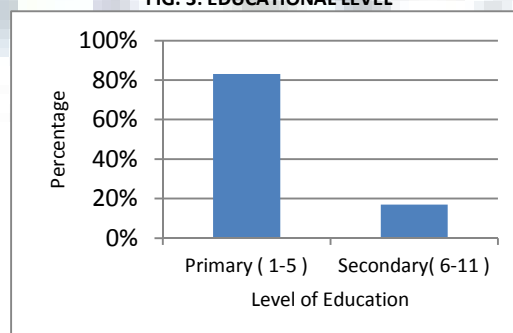
FIG. 2: AGE GROUP



Source: Field Survey, 2013

Education always considered as a means to one's socio-economic position in the society. Formal literate helps to acquire the needed skills and knowledge for any income earning activity. Among the sample fishermen 83% had education up to primary level (1-5 grades) 17% of them had education up to secondary level. The finding of the study shows (fig 2) that higher percentage of fishermen completed primary level of education. Simply, the literate level is substantial among the small scale fisheries in the district. Educational level of fishermen is one of the causes for their existence in small scale fishing activities.

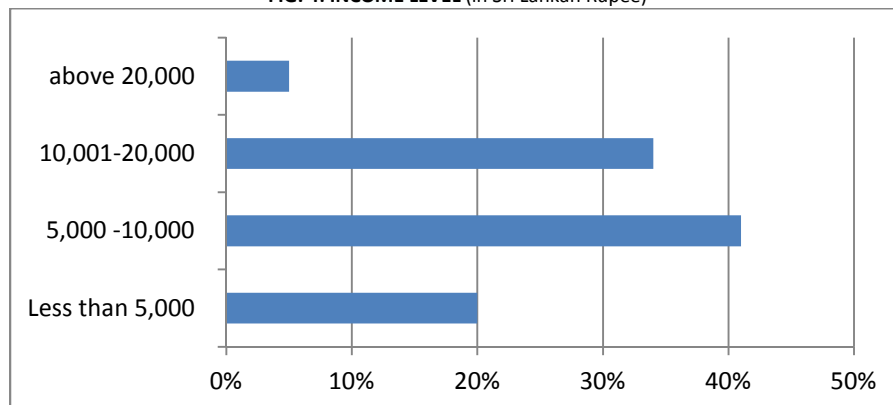
FIG. 3: EDUCATIONAL LEVEL



Source: Field Survey, 2013

FINANCIAL CAPITAL

Financial capital comprises available financial resources of the people or provided capitals for livelihoods. These are mainly credit, savings and other types of remittance. The present study reveals that most of the households received credit facilities from various organizations. Level of saving among the respondents is very low. The household income has been considered as an important indicator of socio economic status. Among the respondents, 20% of the fishing households earning less than 5000 Sri Lankan rupees per month while 41% of them earn 5,000- 10,000. The percentage of monthly income earning households between 10,001 -20,000 is 34. Only 5% of households earn more than 20,000 Sri Lankan rupees. Around 61% Small scale fishers earn less than 10,000 Sri Lankan rupees per month. 81 % of the respondents reported that the income is not sufficient to meet their basic demands. Moreover, the findings reveal that 58% of the respondents are earning income from alternative work during the off seasons. The fig. 3 indicates the percentage of income level of small-scale fishermen in the study area. The study illustrates that all fisheries households in the study area have equal opportunity to get credit facilities. However, usage of the facilities does not help to organize their livelihoods.

FIG. 4: INCOME LEVEL (in Sri Lankan Rupee)

Source: Field Survey, 2013

PHYSICAL CAPITAL

Physical capital contains basic infrastructure (e.g. secure shelter, adequate water supplies and sanitation, affordable transport and access to information) and producer goods (e.g. tools and equipment) needed to support livelihoods. The nature of the house indicates the social status of the people. The results of the study show that 91% of the sample households has own houses with sanitation facilities. These houses were provided under the various Tsunami housing projects. However, 9% of the households live with relative and in temporary huts. The sanitary facilities of peoples who live in huts were not satisfactory level. The study also reveals that the 55% of the houses have own protected well for drinking water. 32% of the households get water from common wells and common pipe lines. 25 % of households reported that they have full set of equipments for fishing. Others are working as daily labours.

NATURAL CAPITAL

Natural capital of fishermen consists of natural resource such as land, water, timber and environmental goods to support production. People of fishing communities depend on various types of natural resources for their livelihoods. Ownership of the land and land size are the important socio-economic indicators of fishing households. The present study shows that the 9% of the respondent has no land to organize alternative livelihood activities in the study area.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social network and relationship are exploring the social resources. Marital status, membership of social organizations and links are important in social capital. These kinds of relationship and links help the households to improve the livelihoods. The study shows that the marital status of households is 92%. This marital linkage may help households to choose alternative livelihood activities. Participation of households in social organizations is very high in the study area. 87% of respondent households are active members in fishery co-operative union. 13% respondents were absent in giving any information on social network.

CONCLUSION

The study has conducted to explore the livelihoods status of small-scale fisheries households in selected villages in the Batticalao district of Sri Lanka. The study area severely affected by internal war, Tsunami and recent flood. Many efforts have been taken by NGOs and Government to build the livelihoods for vulnerable fishing households in the study area. However, most of the fisheries households, particularly small scale fishing families, are in vulnerable situation. Lack of understanding about well established patterns of livelihood and diversification in fishing communities were the important issues in the study area. A dynamic multi dimension livelihood project should be implemented for the betterments of the fishing households in the study area and trainings on diversified livelihood activities would be organized.

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