

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF THE FISHING COMMUNITY ASSOCIATED IN NUWARA WEWA RESERVOIR

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Sri Lanka is blessed with several perennial and seasonal reservoirs with huge potential for developing inland fisheries. Present study focused on the investigation of socioeconomic status of the fishing community at Nuwarawewa, a perennial urban reservoir. Data were collected from the fishing community by interviewing 75% of the fishing community using semi structured questionnaires and direct observations considering important aspects of the socioeconomic status and the data were analyzed by using SPSS software. Fisher folks (125) were categorized as registered and non-registered and registered fishermen were further categorized into temporary and active fishers (40). All active fishers were Sinhala and majority was Buddhists (84%) and others were Christians (16%). Male representation for fishing activities was 93% while 7% from females. Majority (39%) were in 30-40 age category and 2% represented above 60 years. 9% of the community were illiterate and 23% had secondary education while 68% had primary education. Among the active fishers 82% had their own fishing gears and crafts, while 18% worked with hired crafts. In contrast, all the active fishers owned at least any type of gill net and among 26% had nylon nets, (4%) had monofilament gill nets with different mesh sizes while majority had both types of nets. Few used hook and line (4%) for targeting eels. Their average monthly income varied with the season and was ranged between Rs. 10 000 – 21 000. Apart from fishing, paddy cultivation (24%), three wheeler driving (25%) or involving in animal husbandry (8%) and working as tenant farmers (9%) on a daily hired basis they generated supplementary income while 44% were totally depended on fishing. Most fishers were smokers (54%) or liquor addicts (51%) or did both as a habit. Women in the fishing community were not well educated and most were unemployed (87%). Most fishermen had selected fishing as their livelihood since it was an inherent occupation (52%) and 39% responded as a free occupation without any compulsion while 9% reported lack of alternatives due to their poor education. Although most fishers owned a land, housing conditions were poor. The sanitary conditions were not in a sufficient level (67%) due to their poverty and ignorance regarding the health. Most used pipe borne water or their own wells while few suffered from safe drinking water scarcity. There was no significant ($p > 0.05$) relationship between their education level and income, preference for younger generation attending for fishing and smoking and liquor addiction and there was no significant ($p > 0.05$) relationship between experience and income. In general, socioeconomic status of the fishing community of Nuwarawewa was not in satisfactory level. To uplift their livelihoods it is necessary to have well-structured awareness programmes and subsidizing system either from government sector or non-government organisations.

Key words: Fishing community, Fishing gear, Inland fisheries, Socioeconomics