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The End of Poverty: How can small-scale fishers make it reality?

D.C.T. Dissanayake

Department of Zoology, Faculty of Applied Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Gangodawila, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.

Corresponding author (email: chamari@sjp.ac.lk)

Fisheries provide a source of income for over 100 million people around the globe, of which nearly ~90% are employed in small-scale fishing activities for their livelihood. Majority of small-scale fishing communities are considered as poor and vulnerable. They are poor, not merely due to a lack of resources, but also due to a certain social factors that limit their access and control over to the resource bases, hampering their ability to convert such resources into positive livelihood outcomes. However, overexploitation and depletion of fishery resources due to an open access and multi-use nature of fisheries, use of destructive and IUU fishing practices, low marketing capabilities as the consequences of lack of infrastructure and services, geographical or political isolation of fishers, poor quality products, high level of postharvest losses, pay back buy back system, restriction of direct access to market, political and institutional marginalization of the fishing communities are the key factors that limit the economic success of small-scale fishers.

Combating poverty is one of the millennium development goals. Hence, international communities have given high priority to reduce poverty in their development plans. The poverty reduction in small-scale fishing communities could be achieved in many ways. Direct increase in fisheries productivity, ensuring access to and control over the resources, development of aquaculture practices and strengthening the restocking of inland water bodies are often viewed as quick solutions. Further, reducing fleet overcapacity and implement proper measures to combat IUU fishing will also make a significant contribution. Improvement of post-harvest and marketing capacity is another key area that could be used to pro-poor improvement in small scale fisheries. Minimize postharvest losses and improve product quality by adopting appropriate technologies in processing, preservation, transportation and storage, encourage small-scale local processing and value-added products where infrastructure and labour are available and promote the use of certification schemes and codes of practices for seafood products are some main areas that would help to maximize the profit. Livelihood diversification is another strategy for risk management and poverty prevention in rural small-scale fishers. Creating alternative livelihood opportunities outside the fishing sector, such as ecotourism, mangrove rehabilitation will encourage people to move out of fishing activities. This type of cross-sectorial diversification of fishing communities may have positive impacts on fishery-dependent communities both directly and indirectly. Decentralization of management responsibilities to the local level poor fishers is another focus area for poverty alleviation as it improves responsibility, representativeness and accountability of small-scale fishers on the resource management, thereby enhance the chances to integrate their needs and priorities into the decision-making level.