

Present status of the fishery in Rekawa lagoon, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Rekawa lagoon (240ha) is one of the important brackish water bodies in the Southern coast of Sri Lanka, the fishery of which has been exploited under artisanal basis for years by small-scale fishers using different types of traditional fishing gears. This study aimed to assess the present status of the fishery of Rekawa lagoon. The study was carried out from May to October 2004 to collect fish catch and effort data. Drift gillnets, cast nets and fish kraals are the permissible fishing gears in the lagoon. Fishing activities are managed by the Rekawa Lagoon Management Committee. The drift gillnet is the prominent gear and 11 feet non-mechanized fibreglass vessel is the common fishing craft. Kraal operations are seasonally conducted with onset of shrimp. Of the fish sampled, 22 finfish and 5 shellfish species were identified. *Nematalosa nasus*, *Pseudarius jella*, *Oreochromis niloticus* and *Liza dussumieri* were the main fin fish species caught. Although, *Penaeus indicus* has been the common species in the lagoon, because of the stocking practises conducted by NARA, *P. monodon* dominated the shellfish catches during the study period. The present study shows that the present fish production in the lagoon is very low so that fishers are in need of alternative livelihood options.

Key words: Rekawa lagoon, artisanal fishery, fish kraal, Co-management.

Introduction

Sri Lanka has a coastal line of approximately 1760km dotted with a large number of estuaries and lagoons. The total brackish water area covers 120,000ha consisting of lagoons, estuaries, swamps, tidal pools etc. Puttalam, Chilaw, Bolgoda, Negambo, Batticaloe and Jaffna lagoon are the main brackish water bodies in Sri Lanka. These water bodies are rich in both fin fish and shellfish resources. These ecosystems are important not only for fisheries but also as nursery grounds for a number of species of fin fish and shellfish. Since there is a large energy inputs in the form of detritus, lagoons and estuaries are the highly productive ecosystems, which are second only to the coral reefs (De Silva and De Silva, 1984).

Rekawa lagoon (240ha/ 6° 05'N and 80° 50'E) is a small basin estuary situated in the southern coast in Hambantota district, Sri Lanka (Figure 1). It is situated in the