



Full length article



Impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the fisheries sector of Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

We empirically ascertained the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on fisheries sector of Sri Lanka, focusing on the year 2020 which helps identify changes in production and income of the sector. Daily wage and monthly income of stakeholders in the pre-pandemic period are well above the national minimum daily wage and monthly income of the workers in Sri Lanka. Defensive measures taken to curb rapid spread of COVID-19 have given a shock to all stakeholders of the sector. Health and safety measures imposed to avert the spreading of pandemic have compelled the stakeholders to incur extra costs. Study indicates significant impact of the pandemic on production and income of the stakeholders in the fisheries value chain. Comparison of total fish production during 2015–2020 confirms the impacts on the sector and, changes in fish production and income in 2020 completely coincide with COVID-19-time line. Severity of impacts is stakeholder and area specific. Fisheries districts in western province are highly impacted over the other districts. DPSIR framework captures the status of social system and unfolds existing problems in the sector, enabling decision-makers to take policy decisions for future actions. Government of Sri Lanka has taken several steps to revive the sector, and stakeholders have shown an adaptive capacity to cope with impacts of the pandemic. Present crisis in the sector is far from over and, short-term impacts are likely to be followed by long-term crises, thus measures should be taken to revive the sector in new normal conditions and the post-pandemic era.

1. Introduction

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic [1] that began in Wuhan, China in December 2019 has reached over 74 million confirmed cases over the globe by 11 June 2021 [2] and has been declared a global pandemic by WHO on 11 March 2020 [3,4]. Ongoing efforts to curb the spread of the pandemic have dramatically disrupted the well-being and livelihoods of billions of people globally [5]. By today, COVID-19 pandemic has spread all around the world except for a few countries with minor effects [6], being a shockwave to various sectors, including fisheries. Sri Lanka is one of the most vulnerable middle-income countries that suffer badly from this global pandemic since its first local case of COVID-19 was recorded in March 2020 [7]. COVID-19 has seriously affected the health of Sri Lankans while putting their livelihoods at great risk [8]. As of 14 September 2021, the government reported 488,482 confirmed cases with 11431 deaths [2]. The government of Sri Lanka

instituted several measures to mitigate the dissemination of COVID-19, including testing and treating of patients, nationwide dusk to dawn curfews, lock-downs, closure of high-risk areas, restrictions on movements & international travel [9]. The cumulative effects of the measures taken to suppress the pandemic have caused an immediate and significant impact on the cost of living and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Sri Lanka [10].

Many fisheries over the globe have faced complete or partial shut-downs at the onset of social distancing that precluded fishers from fishing or trading in close quarters in fish markets [11]. Knock-on economic effects due to market disruptions have directly affected fisher livelihoods through twin disasters; reduced demand and collapse of price [11]. The fisheries sector which plays a significant role in the socioeconomic blooming of many countries has undertaken a productivity crisis with rising of COVID-19 pandemic [12]. For instance, stakeholders of the Indian fisheries sector including fish vendors, processors,

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