

PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNITY-BASED FISHERY MANAGEMENT IN SRI LANKA

K.H.Camilus Fernando

Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development
New Secretariat Building, Maligawatta, Colombo 10

ABSTRACT

Community-based management systems are currently being considered as a substitute for the centrally controlled systems of fisheries management which have had limited success in achieving equitable access to and sustainable exploitation of fishery resources. There are already some examples of community managed fisheries in Sri Lanka and this paper is a discussion of the possibilities of implementing similar schemes in other areas and situations.

Fishermen's cooperative societies can provide the necessary focus within a community on which a management system could be based. Since the number of cooperative societies, their membership and financial resources (both internally generated and loans) have greatly increased since 1989, there is a growing base for possible community-based management. There is, however, also a need for appropriate legislation to ensure that these organisations have the authority, financial strength and broad local participation necessary for the smooth operation of any management scheme. Moreover, there will still be a role for government provided management, financial and technical advice. Some of these requirements are already available in Sri Lanka and the legal framework will be provided by the new Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act.

1. INTRODUCTION

A problem faced by all countries, particularly the developing ones when allocating scarce resources to satisfy the needs of its population, is that of making such allocation not only in an equitable manner, but also in a way that the long term sustainability of such resources can be ensured. The position is no different when we try to exploit the fishery resources available in the sea around us to provide employment as well as the necessary protein for the population. Since the biomass is limited and the number vying to exploit it is increasing day by day, it is necessary to operate some system if we are to ensure that everybody has access to an equitable share while at the same time seeing that the resource is not over exploited to the point of exhaustion. The need for such an approach has become more and more apparent in recent years due to the increasingly severe depletion of coastal fishery resources and the growing conflicts among different groups of fishermen.

The main approach used by most countries to deal with this issue is to lay down the ground rules under which one is allowed to exploit the fishery resources. These rules take into consideration the need to exploit the resources in a sustainable manner while at the same time balancing demands made by different groups for these resources. Such an approach involves the management of fishery resources as against the traditional approach of exploiting such resources in any possible way unmindful of the effect of such exploitation on future stocks.

A new approach to the utilisation of fishery resources that is gaining ground is the community-based approach as opposed to management by the state. It is the view of many that

conventional approaches to management, based on central control have had only limited success so far and that there is a need to explore the usefulness of the community-based management system which appears to have many advantages over conventional approaches in many situations. It is appreciated that such systems are not universally applicable to all situations. Nevertheless the experience of several countries, including Japan, indicate that they can be highly effective in the right context. Experience in countries where the community-based approach is practised has shown that this approach has several advantages. It has been found that the management and enforcement costs become lower than the costs under national centralised programmes since a community approach produces a sense of ownership over the resource and makes the fishermen more responsible and accountable for long term sustainability of resources and for surveillance. Further, it provides each community with an opportunity to develop management systems which meet their own particular needs based on active participation by the fishermen.

2. COMMUNITY-BASED MANAGEMENT IN SRI LANKA

The objectives of a good fishery management system would be resource conservation, efficiency in resource exploitation and equity in the division of this resource among the members of the community. Attempts are being made to achieve these objectives not through centralised control exercised by the state as it commonly done, but through the community which is the direct beneficiary of the resource. This would involve handing over to the community exclusive use rights over the resource and motivating its members to manage it in a way that will, so to speak, achieve the greatest good of the greatest number while at the same time conserving the resource. Transference of territorial use rights in fisheries (TURFs) is facilitated by the setting up of a suitable legal framework, formation of user organisations and equipping them with the required technical and scientific know-how, establishment of arbitration and conflict resolution mechanisms and educating the political decision-makers and the general public.

The task before us is that of examining whether such a community-based approach obtains in Sri Lanka and, if not, to what extent it can be implemented given the particular socio-cultural and politico-economic context. The answer to the first question is largely provided by the results of studies by Anton Atapattu and Pauline Dayaratne presented at an expert consultation on the development of community-based fishery management systems for Asia and the Pacific conducted in Japan in June 1992. These studies reveal that community based fishery management systems have been in existence in Sri Lanka for some time. Four case studies presented in two different papers indicate the presence of at least four community-based systems. These are:

1. The Jakottu or fish kraal fishing in the Madu Ganga estuary in the Southern Province;
2. The Kattudel net fishery in the Negombo Lagoon in the Western Province;
3. The trawler and beach seine based shrimp fishery in the North Western Province;
4. The rotational beach seine fishery in the Western and Southern Provinces.

These studies have revealed that in the specific situations referred to, the fishermen have had

the good sense to organise themselves in such a manner as to avoid unnecessary as well as wasteful conflicts among themselves. The Jakottu and Kattudel examples demonstrate that the communities living close to fish resources find it profitable to establish exclusive use rights in those areas of sea, lagoons or estuaries which can be defended from the intrusion of outsiders. The original basis for the use rights had been formulated by the fishermen themselves and the unwritten rules had operated smoothly and effectively for centuries.

The studies referred to show that community based approaches are not new to Sri Lanka. However, the question here is whether such community-based approaches govern the management of a substantial part of the fishery resources of Sri Lanka. The answer, it must be regretfully admitted, is that such approaches touch only a small part of the Sri Lankan fishery industry. This leads us to consider whether the prospects for building on the existing community-based approaches to cover a substantial part of the Sri Lankan fishery industry are good or otherwise. In order to make an assessment in this regard we have to examine the facilitating factors available in Sri Lanka at present.

A prerequisite for implementing a community-based approach is the existence of a cohesive group within the community which can take charge of the fishery resources either on its own initiative or under provision made in the law of the country and manage it for the common good. However, a collection of people do not become a group merely by virtue of living in close proximity to one another. There are a number of factors which facilitate the formation of such cohesive groups. One is the presence of a common set of beliefs or a common philosophy. Another is the presence of a common threat or problem affecting the well-being of all or most of the members. Under such circumstances people tend to come together and form themselves into an integrated whole with a common focus instead of remaining a mere aggregate of persons. Associations are a powerful force that tend to bring people together and in the Sri Lankan context such an association is the cooperative movement. Membership of cooperatives has given the members of the community a common purpose through which it is possible to mobilise them towards a community-based approach in dealing with their problems. Thus where cooperatives have been set up for fishermen, it becomes possible to implement a community-based approach to the exploitation of the fishery resource needed for their livelihood. With the orientation they receive, they begin to see this resource as a common property and this brings out a desire to use systems of exploitation which also conserve.

Therefore one can say that where there is a strong cooperative movement, it becomes possible to successfully introduce and operate a community-based approach. In Sri Lanka fishery cooperative societies have registered a remarkable growth since 1989 as can be seen from Figs. 1 —3. In 1989 there were 540 societies with a membership of 25,400. While the share capital was Rs. 860,000, total funds available to the societies amounted to Rs. 1.5 million. By 1993 the number of societies had increased to 769 and the membership to 86,966, an overall increase of 229 percent and an annual growth rate of 57 percent. The total share capital rose to Rs. 8.3 million and the total funds available increased to Rs. 277.9 million.

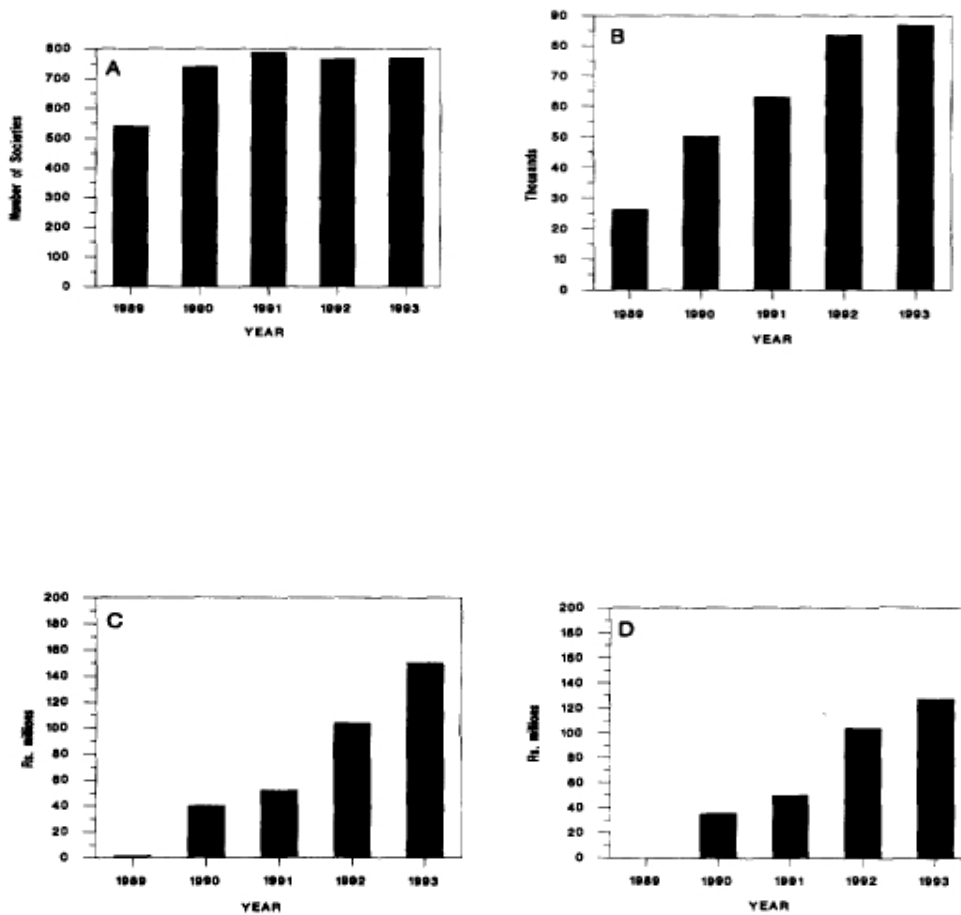


Fig. 1. The progress of village level fisheries cooperative societies from 1989-1993. A is number of societies; B is membership of those societies; C is total society funds (i.e. the sum of shares, savings, subsidy, funds from IRDP, Provincial Councils District Budget, and income minus expenditure); D is bank loans.

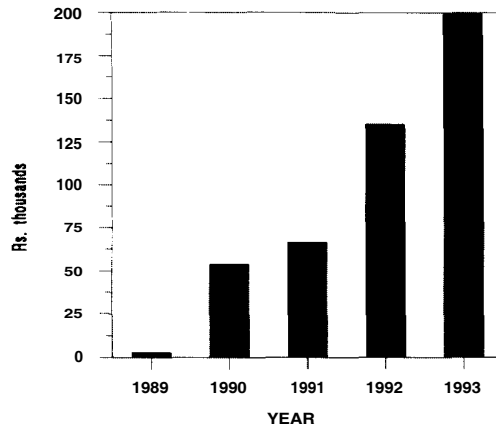


Fig. 2. Grama Niladan level fisheries cooperative societies - average total funds per society 1989 - 1993 (thousands of Rupees).

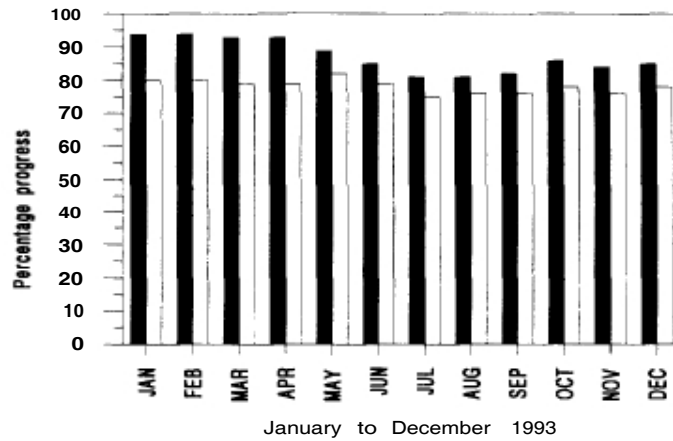


Fig. 3. Progress of recoveries by banks of loans given to fisheries cooperative societies for the procurement of craft (solid bars) and for self-employment (open bars).

3. FUTURE REQUIREMENTS

Thus, it can be seen that an important facilitating force is available for encouraging a community-based approach but to make full use of this in order to extend this approach more widely, there are several other factors that are necessary. They were identified by a panel that examined the role of community organisations in fishery management at the expert consultation referred to earlier. These are:

- i. need for legal support in order to establish legitimacy for the organisation as well power to manage;
- ii. need for all persons involved in fishery related activities to belong to the organisation;
- iii. although, homogeneity is not absolutely necessary, members should at least, have common interests and objectives;
- iv. the organisation must be economically viable in order to create confidence in the minds of the fishermen. In this regard, the organisation should be economically self-reliant and capable of maintaining itself through income generating activities;
- v. the organisation must provide for participation by all members, specially in planning implementation and evaluation. An environment must be established and maintained where the members feel able to take the initiative and develop their own rules and patterns of organisations to meet the local conditions;
- vi. The Government must establish a legislative basis for the organisation and management of fisheries. The Government should provide guidance and advice as well as financial and technical assistance as may be necessary.

While factors 1 to 6 are available in Sri Lanka to some extent, there has been no legislative basis for fishery management through fisheries organisations like cooperatives. The existing Fisheries Ordinance is based purely on a centralised approach and there is no provision to use a community based approach. However, recognising the need for promoting a community-based approach and the consequent need for suitable legislative provision to facilitate it, steps have been taken to provide for such provision in the new draft Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act. Section 31 of this Act reads thus:

31. (1). The Minister may, by notice published in the Gazette –
- (a). designate prescribed areas of Sri Lanka Waters or land adjacent thereto or both such waters and land as local fisheries management areas for the purposes of this Act; and
 - (b). designate any existing fishermen's society, association, or other body representative of the fishermen operating in that local fisheries management authority for that area, or where no such society, association or other body exists

in that area, establish such local fisheries management authority by Order published in the Gazette.

- (2). A local fisheries management authority designated or established by an Order made under subsection (1), may make recommendations to the Minister on—
- (a) the conduct of fishing operations and the use of different types of fishing gear in that local fisheries management area;
 - (b) the establishment of closed seasons for fishing or closed seasons for the taking of specified species of fish in that local fisheries management area; and
 - (c) the times during which fish may be taken.

When this Act comes into operation most of the elements needed to promote a community-based approach to the management of fishery resources would be in place and with a little support from political decision makers, it would be possible to extend this approach to cover a wider area than at present. There are salutary signs that such support will be forthcoming from the political decision makers. The Hon. Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development declared at a meeting held in Batticaloa on 29/09/1994 that he wanted to hand over the Batticaloa Lagoon to the local fishermen for management. This is a clear sign of the will to move towards community-based fisheries management in the future. Under these circumstances one can conclude that the prospects for developing community-based fishery management in Sri Lanka are indeed good.