

# ***THE FISHERFOLK OF PUTTALAM, CHILAW, GALLE AND MATARA, SRI LANKA***



A study of the socio-economic  
status of the fisherfolk of  
four fisheries districts in Sri Lanka

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THE FISHERFOLK OF PUTTALAM, CHILAW,  
GALLE AND MATARA DISTRICTS, SRI LANKA

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The Ministry of Fisheries  
and Aquatic Resources,  
Sri Lanka  
and  
The Bay of Bengal Programme

In 1988, the Government of Sri Lanka requested the Bay of Bengal Programme for Fisheries Development (BOBP) to assist the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (MFAR) to formulate and execute a fisherfolk credit project. It was agreed that the project would aim at developing comprehensive, need-based lending schemes that would incorporate simplicity, timeliness and flexibility, and which would help the fisherfolk to increase their operational efficiency, develop savings/thrift habits and better manage their incomes and resources by linking savings with credit.

The BOBP planned to start its work with a socio-economic survey in order to get a better grasp of the fisherfolk's needs. MFAR, at this point, felt the scope of the survey could be expanded in order to strengthen its own information base. MFAR and BOBP thereafter worked together on planning a survey to meet the needs of both, the twin objectives being to obtain socio-economic information that would help in the formulation of the new credit scheme and also supplement the existing socio-economic information base of MFAR relating to the fisherfolk communities of Sri Lanka.

The survey was conducted in 1989 by MFAR with the technical and financial assistance of BOBP. This document presents some of the more important findings of the survey, which was conducted in the coastal villages of four fishing districts in Sri Lanka. The learning experience during the survey would, MFAR felt, help considerably in its future surveys in the fishing districts of the island.

The Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP) is a multi-agency regional fisheries programme which covers seven countries around the Bay of Bengal — Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The Programme plays a catalytic and consultative role: it develops, demonstrates and promotes new techniques, technologies or ideas to help improve the conditions of small-scale fisherfolk communities in member-countries. The BOBP is sponsored by the governments of Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom, by member-governments in the Bay of Bengal Region, and also by UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), AGFUND (Arab Gulf Fund for United Nations Development Organizations) and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). The main executing agency is the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations).

This document has not been cleared by the Government of Sri Lanka or the FAO.

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## PREFACE

The Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Sri Lanka, in collaboration with the Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP) for Fisheries Development, conducted a socio-economic survey of small-scale fisherfolk communities in 1988-89. This survey was carried out in three districts of the island as part of a fisherfolk credit project supported by the BOBP.

The survey filled an important gap that had hitherto existed in the fisheries socio-economic data and made available a wealth of information which will considerably help fisheries planning, development and management in Sri Lanka. The Ministry hopes to carry out similar surveys in other districts of the country and will, in doing so, use the experience gained during this survey.

The survey was jointly planned by Mrs Gardien El Gendy, Socio-economist (Associate Professional Officer), the late Mr Clinton Fernando, National Credit Officer of the Bay of Bengal Programme, and Messrs H S G Fernando, Assistant Director, Marine Fisheries, and H A B Rodrigo, Statistical Officer of the Ministry, under the overall guidance and direction of Mr A R Atapattu, Director of Fisheries, and Mr R N Roy, Training and Extension Officer, BOBP. The field work was carried out by the fisheries inspectors under the supervision of the District Extension Fishery Officers of the Fisheries Districts of Puttalam, Chilaw, Galle and Matara. The data processing was done by DMS Ltd using computer programmes designed by the Centre for Women's Research, Sri Lanka (CENWOR).

The Ministry appreciates the dedicated services rendered by all those named above and all the others who contributed in numerous ways to the survey's success. The Ministry is particularly grateful to the Director and the staff of the Bay of Bengal Programme for providing technical as well as financial assistance for this survey.

April 1991  
Inner Harbour Road  
Trincomalee  
Sri Lanka

N.V.K.K. WERAGODA  
Secretary,  
Ministry of Fisheries &  
Aquatic Resources



*An enumerator at work, in homes and on the beach.*



## 1. INTRODUCTION

A socio-economic survey, carried out in three districts along the west coast of Sri Lanka in 1989 as part of a fisherfolk credit project supported by the Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP), revealed that very few fishing households (36 per cent) had access to credit and that institutional sources catered to only 17 per cent of the households which obtained loans. The main purpose of loans, it was, however, found, was to meet consumption and related needs. Loans for fishing craft and gear were sought by only a third of the households.

The survey covered 5276 fishing households, 5768 active fishermen and a fishing population of 25,704 in the three districts. Of these households, only 43 per cent had incomes of more than Rs.3000. With incomes low and the average household spending two-thirds of its money on food, beverages and clothing, there was very little opportunity for savings. Only 32 per cent of the households had any savings.

Low incomes and little savings would seem to make living on loans a way of life. But with collateral short, institutional loans are difficult to obtain. The findings mentioned in the pages following indicate what these fisherfolk own and what they are in a position to offer as security for loans taken. But the following summary is indicative of the community's credit-status.

Of the total population in the over-15 age group (1 6,137), 45 per cent are employed and they include about 80 per cent of the male population surveyed in this group. Almost 80 per cent of the employed population are engaged in fishing, with 79 per cent of those employed in fishing working as crew members or skippers aboard fishing vessels. However, only 28 per cent of the fishing households own any fishing craft — and 42 per cent of the operating craft and 45 per cent of their engines are over 6 years old. Sixty per cent of the gear used is gillnets, with fishing lines accounting for most of the rest.

More positive indicators were those of permanent settlement. Most households (89 per cent) had independent housing units and 83 per cent of them had hygienically acceptable sources of drinking water. Toilets, however, were available only in 36 per cent of the households.

Another positive indicator was that 87 per cent of those surveyed were literate, with about 40 per cent having studied up to at least the O-Level (Grade IO).

## 2. BACKGROUND

In 1988, at the request of the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (MFAR), the Bay of Bengal Programme for Fisheries Development (BOBP) agreed to formulate and execute a project to assist in the design and implementation of a credit scheme for small-scale fisherfolk which did not rely on the use of government subsidies for purchases of boats, gear and engines. This request was made at a time when the government subsidies for boats, engines and gear had been drastically reduced and the credit flow to the fisheries sector had reached a low ebb on account of poor recoveries of past fisheries loans.

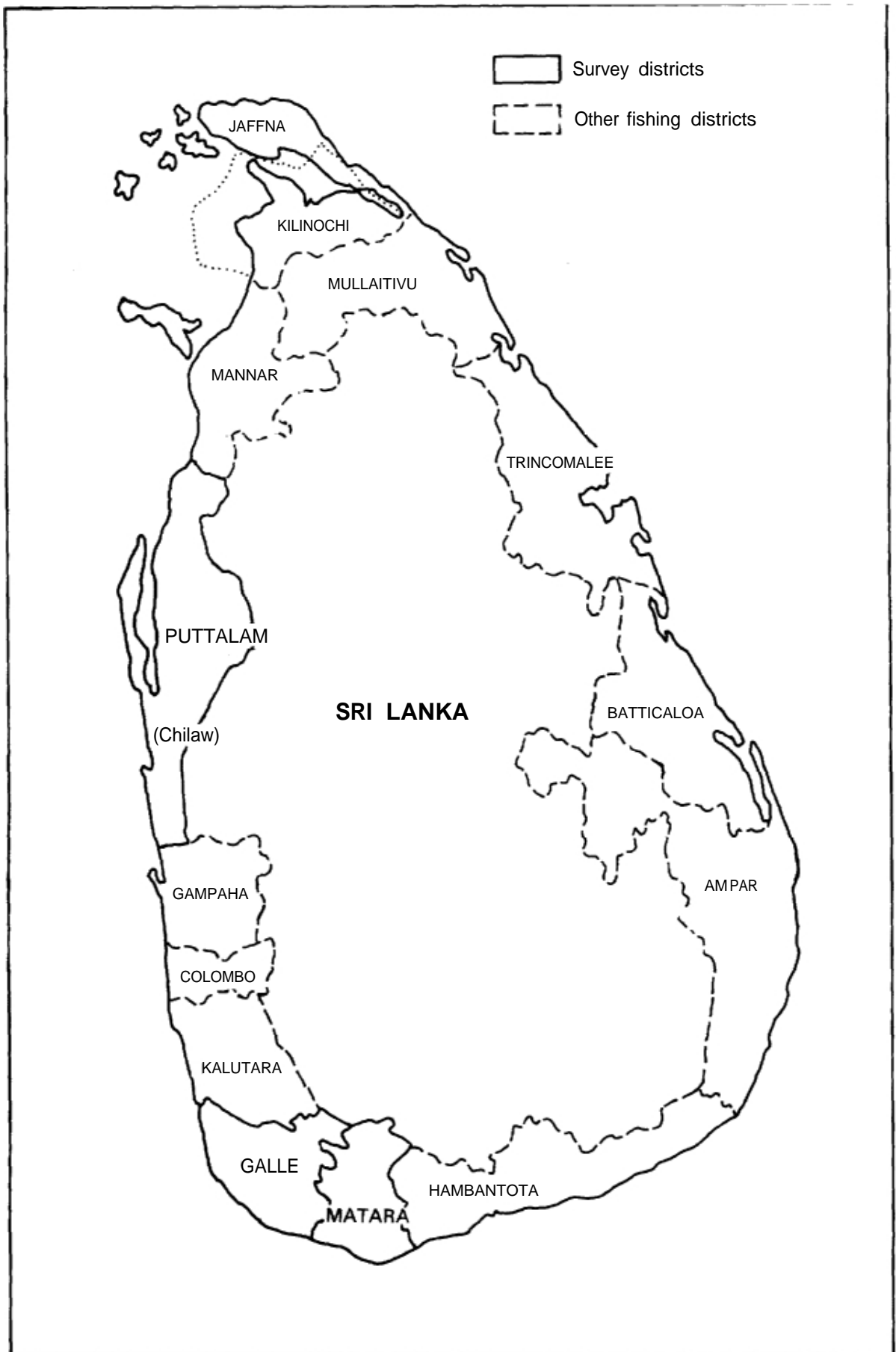
### 2.1 Objectives

The BOBP project was intended to develop comprehensive need-based lending schemes that incorporated simplicity, timeliness and flexibility and which could, thereby, help the fisherfolk

- increase the efficiency and profitability of their fisheries and non-fisheries economic activities,



Fig 1. The area of the socio-economic survey



- develop savings/thrift habits by introducing them to bank saving facilities, and manage their resources themselves, particularly by linking savings and credit.

## 2.2 Need for survey

The credit schemes available for the fishermen at the time the project was started were limited to fishing activities and particularly to the purchase of capital goods. A survey was therefore proposed to be conducted among the fisherfolk communities in the project area to ascertain the genuine credit needs of the fisherfolk that needed to be met by the BOBP Credit Project when it was formulated and implemented. In addition to this immediate objective, the MFAR also indicated that there was an urgent need for a comprehensive socio-economic survey, as there was very little data on the socio-economics of small-scale fisheries in the island and even the scanty information which was available was largely out of date.

This report serves to set out the salient features of that survey and to highlight the more significant findings.

## 3. SURVEY AREA

The socio-economic survey was conducted in the area selected for BOBP's Fisherfolk Credit Project, namely, the fisheries districts of Puttalam, Chilaw (both of which are within the administrative district of Puttalam), Galle and Matara. The survey area is shown in Figure 1. It has a coastline of 371.75 km (Galle 79.3 km, Matara 51.20 km and Puttalam 241.24 km), which is 23.8 per cent of the total length of the coastline of the island.

These four fisheries districts were selected for the Credit Project as they were considered to be generally representative of the fisheries situation in the country, particularly in terms of fishing craft and methods, physical infrastructure, and the economic and social conditions prevailing in the fisherfolk communities. In addition, these districts have been accounting for 30-35 per cent of the total production of marine fish in the country during the past five years. That these districts are quite significant in the marine fisheries subsector of Sri Lanka is confirmed by the findings of the fisheries frame survey conducted by the MFAR in the first part of 1989. Some of those findings are tabulated below :

<i>Parameters</i>	<i>All-island total</i>	<i>Contribution of the four districts</i>	<i>Contribution of the four districts to total (%)</i>
1. Fishing households (no.)	87,808	16,269	18.6
2. Active fishermen (no.)	98,404	19,726	20.0
3. Fishing population (no.)	412,200	80,149	19.4
4. Production of fish (t) (avg. '85-'89)	147,617	20,037	13.6
5. Fishing craft (no.)			
(a) Motorized	14,851	4,581	31.0
(b) Non-motorized	14,877	4,707	32.0

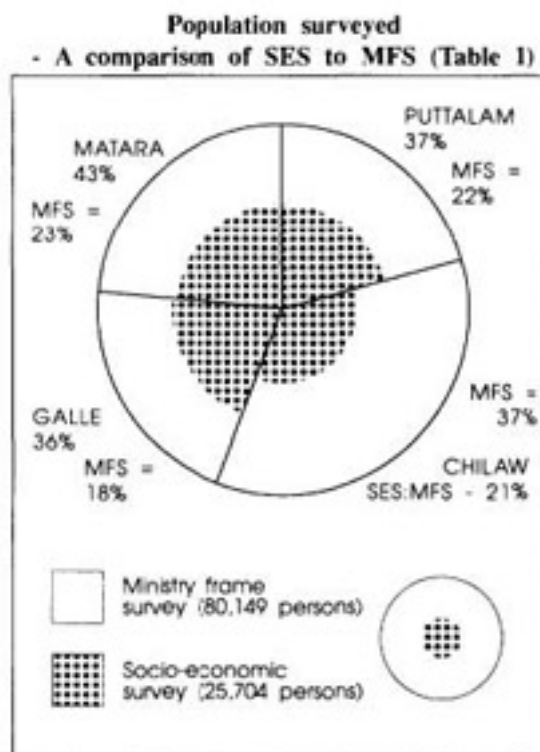
## 4. SCHEDULE

The survey was planned to commence during the first part of 1988. However, because of the difficult ground conditions in the survey area as a result of civil disturbances, the original time schedule could not be adhered to. Consequently, after a series of setbacks and delays, the activities of the survey could commence only in mid-1989. Even thereafter, the progress was very slow and irregular, and, as a result, the field work was completed only in November 1989.

## 5. SURVEY COVERAGE

When the survey was originally planned, it was meant to be a hundred per cent enumeration of the fishing households in the four districts. However, as a result of the uncertain conditions mentioned above, 100 per cent enumeration within a reasonable time-frame was considered unrealistic. Hence, the coverage of the survey was, with much reluctance, reduced in scale to cover about 25 per cent of the total fishing households. This reduction was effected by selecting a sample of fishing villages in the districts chosen. The selection of the samples was done in consultation with the Planning and Programming Division of the MFAR. The actual survey coverage, however, was quite a bit more than targeted in the revised planning.

A comparison of the actual coverage with the findings of the MFAR frame survey given in Table 1 shows that the survey was indeed quite wide and substantial. Actually 5276 out of 16,269 households were covered in the four districts surveyed, a 32 per cent coverage and 7 per cent more than the target coverage. Out of the 19,726 active fishermen in the four districts, 5768 were covered by the survey, a 29 per cent coverage. And of a fisherfolk population of 80,149, the survey covered 25,704, which is 32 per cent of the population.



**Table I**  
**Socio-economic survey (1988) and the Ministry frame survey (1989)**  
- A comparison

<i>Fisheries districts</i>		<i>Fishing households (no.)</i>	<i>Active fishermen (no.)</i>	<i>Population (no.)</i>
Puttalam	MFS	3732	4539	17,821
	SES	1417	1643	6603
	% Coverage	38	36	37
Chilaw	MFS	6325	7173	29,302
	SES	1293	1437	6107
	% Coverage	20	20	21
Galle	MFS	2871	3590	14,813
	SES	1285	1400	6395
	% Coverage	45	39	43
Matara	MFS	3341	4426	18,213
	SES	1281	1288	6599
	% Coverage	38	29	36
All four	MFS	16,269	19,728	80,149
	SES	5276	5768	25,704
	% Coverage	32	29	32

ABBREVIATIONS: MFS - Ministry frame survey; SES - Socio-economic survey

## 6. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey was planned and conducted jointly by the BOBP — represented by its Socio-economist (APO), Mrs Gardien El Gendy, and the National Credit Officer, the late Mr Clinton Fernando — and the MFAR represented by Messrs H S G Fernando, Assistant Director, Marine, and H A B Rodrigo, Statistical Officer. Overall direction and supervision was provided by the Director of Fisheries, Mr A R Atapattu, and Mr R N Roy, BOBP's Extension and Training Officer.

### 6.1 *The questionnaire*

The information was gathered through a comprehensive questionnaire which covered all aspects of small-scale fisheries. The questionnaire was drawn up after considerable consultations between the MFAR, the BOBP and other organizations, such as the Women's Bureau, CENWOR, Sri Lanka Foundation Institute etc. It was finalized during a training course on Socio-Economic Survey Methodology conducted in August-September 1988 for fisheries officers.

It was originally envisaged that the survey would concentrate on information of relevance to the Credit Project, but it was subsequently expanded and adjusted to accommodate the data requirements of the MFAR, particularly those relating to welfare and community development-oriented aspects. The questionnaire was then reformatted by CENWOR to enable the computer processing of the raw data.

The complexity of the questionnaire gave rise to a series of problems. Consequently, after comprehensive field testing, and taking into consideration the need to accelerate the field work, it was decided in August 1989 to delete some of the sections in it not considered essential.

### 6.2 *Enumeration*

The data collection in the field was done by Fisheries Inspectors of the MFAR assigned to the project areas. These officers were chosen for the fieldwork because of their familiarity with the areas as well as with the more important aspects dealt with in the survey. In all, 32 Fisheries Inspectors participated in the field enumeration which covered 89 villages. Each enumerator was assigned 30-40 households, some of which they visited more than once. The required information was obtained during these visits through personal interviews as well as observation.

The work was supervised and monitored by the District Fisheries Extension Officers (DFEO) in charge of the respective districts. BOBP staff and officials of the MFAR also provided guidance and assistance to the enumerators/supervisors.

To ensure reliability and accuracy of the data collected, the enumerators were given adequate training on the questionnaire and on interviewing and data collection techniques. These were the important elements of the one-week training course held in August/September 1988.

At the end of the enumeration, a series of meetings were held in Galle and Matara (November 1989) and in Chilaw and Puttalam (in December 1989) to examine the completed questionnaires on a sample basis and rectify any errors which surfaced.

### 6.3 *Data processing*

Data processing was done electronically using a computer programme designed by CENWOR in consultation with BOBP and the MFAR. The actual data processing operation was preceded by a post-coding exercise, in which a team of selected fisheries officers coded the questionnaires using pre-determined codes to facilitate electronic data processing. These officers were given training in post-coding before they started work. The post-coding operation was also useful in spotting erroneously or inaccurately filled questionnaires.