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How participatory is inland fisheries co-management in Sri Lanka?

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Abstract

Participatory and co-management systems in reservoir fisheries have a relatively short history in Sri Lanka. The legal foundation for such management systems has been provided by the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act of 1996. Based on these legal pre-conditions, the Fisheries Community Development and Resource Management Project has promoted the co-management approach in eight perennial reservoirs in the Hambantota and the Monaragala Districts in the southern dry zone of Sri Lanka. Despite the progressive legal provisions, the project experience indicates that the institutional framework and infrastructure for extension are so far not favourable for the proper implementation of co-management systems in Sri Lanka. This paper argues that the fisheries co-management presently established is of the instrumental type where the fishers are only involved in the implementation process. Among other recommendations the paper stresses the importance of a better representation of fishers in fisheries decision-making and to move towards a more functional decentralisation. This could be achieved by a better organisational structure and procedures that are legally better-defined, and by providing guidelines and training that would compel and support the fisheries administration and extension staff to consult the fishers and consider their views.