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Conflicts and conflict prevention in perennial reservoir fisheries management

U. KUMARA, N. SIRIWARDENA* AND C. LIDZBA

Fisheries Community Development & Resource Management Project

C/o German Technical Co-operation

GTZ Office Sri Lanka

6 Jawatte Avenue, Colombo 07

Sri Lanka

*Corresponding author (E-mail: nalakasen@yahoo.com)

Abstract

In comparison to marine fisheries, reservoir capture fisheries in Sri Lanka have a relatively short history. Therefore, this sector faces the absence of well-defined user rights, properly established structures and mechanisms, and long-term experiences. At the early stages the social recognition of fish-ing for an income had been very low, only the poorest strata of the communi-ties engaged in fisheries. More recently, the growing population and the in-creasing scarcity of resources force rural people to seek incomes supplemen-tary or alternative to agriculture. This has led to a continuously increasing number of people depending on a cash income from reservoir fisheries. Expe-rience of the Fisheries Community Development and Resources Management Project indicates that so far neither Fisheries Co-operative Societies nor the Fisheries Management Committees can cope with the increasing demand on the reservoir fisheries. This paper looks at social, distributional, institutional and historical issues that have led to conflicts among the fishers and ham-pered the proper management of the fisheries resources. Considering the pre-vailing local socio-cultural conditions, conflicts will continue to arise in res-ervoir fisheries management. However, it is possible to prevent or minimise conflicts through sensitive social organising and negotiation. Conflict resolu-tion will always and should always be a central part of inland fisheries man-agement and extension work in Sri Lanka. Therefore, sensitisation, capacity building and training of local fishers and extension staff in conflict recogni-tion, resolution and negotiation skills are crucial for the establishment of a sustainable, participatory management system.