

## THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN FISHERS IN A POOR FISHING VILLAGE ON THE WEST COAST OF SRI LANKA

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The Nagulelliya fishing village (7 42'N, 79'49E) located 1.5 m above mean sea level in Puttalam district on the West coast of Sri Lanka was selected for this study. This village, a narrow strip between the sea and lagoon, is isolated from other villages bordering the South and North, and located within the wild life sanctuary of Anavilundaw. According to available socio-economic data, the village is considered the poorest, with the lowest level of infrastructure available in the administrative division. Nineteen families live in Nagulelliya, all of whom are dependent on fisheries.

A special characteristic of the village is that 11 women are actively engaged in fishing. Six women do beach seine fishing during the six-month period of the Southwest monsoon and fish in the lagoon during the rest of the year. The other five women engage in year-round fishing in the lagoon. This group does not use any gear to fish, instead relying on their bare hands. They catch fish by increasing the turbidity of the water by stirring up the g mud at the bottom of the lagoon. Fish and shrimps, such as Pearl spot (*Entropus suratensis*), Tilapia (*Tilapia mossambica*), Tiger shrimp (*Penaeus monodon*) and White shrimp (*Penaeus indicas*), are the main species caught by this method.

The average income obtained from the catch by these women is not sufficient for the daily expenditure of their families. According to fisheries statistics, women's participation in fishing in the district as a whole is 0.4% of total fishers. However, this village shows a female participation rate of 44% of total fishers, due to socio-economic need. All of the households of these women fishers are below the poverty line; 19% of women in this group are widowed and 60% live with alcohol addicted husbands. Thus, high levels of poverty, inadequate opportunities for employment, and low educational levels have resulted in the presence of a high percentage of women fishers in this village.