

## **A Preliminary Study on Potentials of Seaweed Culture as an Alternative Livelihood for Small Scale Fishing Community in Southern Coast of Sri Lanka**

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Large scale seaweed mariculture is widespread in many Asian countries for decades. But Sri Lanka is still in its infancy. Therefore, promoting seaweed mariculture as a commercial-scale industry is an urged necessity. Seaweeds grow abundantly along the southern coast of Sri Lanka. Therefore, the study attempted to assess the socio-economic status of small-scale fishermen, the potentiality of using seaweed culture as an alternative livelihood, and awareness of fishermen regarding seaweed culture on the southern coast of Sri Lanka. Data were collected by key-informant interviews and questionnaire surveys from November 2019 to February 2020. Cluster sampling was used to draw a sample of 160 fishermen from 8 major landing sites. Results of the socio-economic analysis showed that 72% of fishermen were between the age group of 35 - 55 years. Due to the seasonality of fishing, 65% of fishermen are having below-average monthly income (LKR 12,000 - 15,000). In three landing sites, 25% of fishermen are seasonal fishers. But almost all fishers are active in other landing sites. In total, 90% of fishermen are interested in seaweed farming. Identified reasons for their interest in seaweed culture were, additional income (85%), manageable with fishing (65%), and women empowerment (58%). Results relevant to awareness on seaweed farming among fishermen 80 - 90% in four landing sites, 60 - 65% in two landing sites, and below 30% in the other two landing sites. Favorable environmental conditions, adequate workforce, and willingness to initiate seaweed culture were identified as potentials. Absence of proper mechanism to disseminate knowledge, financial support, and lack of knowledge on marketing were identified as constraints for the initiation of seaweed farming. Accordingly, knowledge regarding seaweed farming should be disseminated and effectively transferred. The overall results indicate greater potential to initiate seaweed mariculture as an alternative livelihood for small scale fishing communities in southern Sri Lanka.

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