



Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for South and Southeast Asia (RFLP)

Case study

Improved beach access boosts fisher incomes in Sri Lanka

By Nishan Dissanayake, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, RFLP Sri Lanka

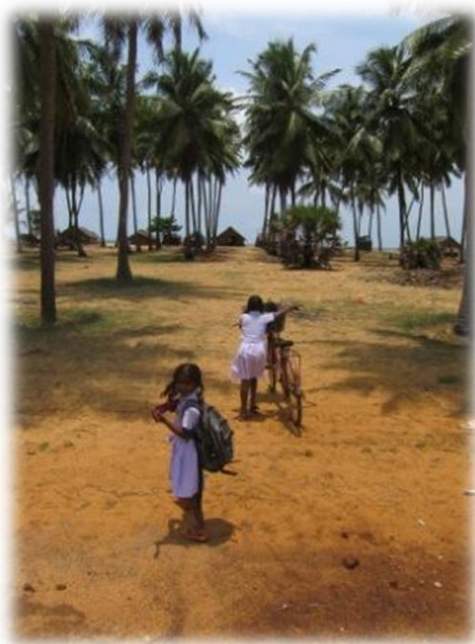


Figure: Prior to renovation, sandy paths made beach access difficult

Introduction

Sinnapaduwa is a fisheries village in the North West province of Sri Lanka, approximately 250 km north of the capital Colombo. There are around 3,500 fishers living in the area operating some 250 boats from four landing centres. The area is one of the best fishing grounds in Puttalam district with many retail sellers buying their daily fish supplies here. A major problem in the area was the poorly constructed road system and lack of access paths to many of the beach landing sites. This was a major drawback for fishers since fish buyers could not easily get to the beach to buy their fish while fishers could not carry their fish to the road for sale as it was too heavy. For this reason, middle-trading fish collectors tended to dominate the supply chain (for both fish and ice) to the detriment of the fishers.

Diagram: Supply chain before the intervention

Fish supply chain



Ice supply chain



Context

With their businesses based close to landing sites fish collectors play a major role in the supply chain. Fishers hand over their catch to the fish collectors, who are usually men, on a daily basis. However, the collector only pays the fishers on a weekly or bi-weekly basis after deducting their costs and commission. Prices are decided by the collector and are always much lower than the market price. Fishers have little or no bargaining power with the difficult access to beach landing sites deterring other potential buyers. The ice needed by fishers is also supplied by the collector on a credit basis and the cost deducted from the payment for fish. Local fish buyers and retailers will then buy the fish they need from the fish collectors.

The initiative

In 2011 the Parliamentary select committee in Sri Lanka requested support from RFLP to boost the livelihoods of fishers in the Sinnapaduwa area by improving access to landing sites. This initiative was in line with key RFLP objectives namely to reduce vulnerability of fishers by strengthening their livelihoods as well as to enhance market and value chains. Consultation with the local political authorities identified six new pathways to be constructed in four villages in Sinnapaduwa. Consultations also took place with the Fisheries Societies of these communities about the initiative. The length of the proposed access paths varied with some just a couple of hundred meters long and others a number of kilometers.

A total of 1,046 cubic meters of gravel were needed at a cost of around USD 10,000. Construction was carried out by Palliwasalpaduwa Rural Development Society in Sinnapaduwa and completed in December 2012.

Discussions were held with the Provincial Council of the area to ensure that the roads would be maintained after construction. Technical support was also given by the Divisional Secretary's office in Mundalama to monitor the construction work.



Figure: Access road constructed

Impact of the activity

A monitoring visit was implemented in January 2013, after the monsoon rainy season, to observe the condition of the roads and to gather any early results delivered by the intervention. Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in the area including fishers, retailers, local customers and community leaders.

1. Fishers empowered

Fishers reported that prior to the access paths being built only 5-6 buyers would come to the beach to buy fish from the boats. As access was poor, buyers needed to park their bicycles on the main road and walk around 400 meters to the beach to buy the fish. Only small quantities could be bought since they could not carry them back to their bicycles easily. The majority of buyers would therefore purchase fish from collectors and fishers had no option but to deal with the collectors and to accept low prices.



Figure: Fish buyers at the collector's shop

Major benefits

1. Improved market links through increased numbers of fish buyers
2. No more price fixing
3. 100% increase in income
4. Fishers receive cash payment immediately

However, since the access paths have been constructed fish buyers are now able to directly approach the fishers at the beach landing sites.

The number of fish retailers / cyclists who come to the beach to buy fish has reportedly increased three-fold. For example, fishers in Wennappu Dela in Sinnapaduwa reported that there are now around 30–35 cyclists and local fish buyers coming to the beach daily to buy fish. Fishers are now able to sell their harvest directly from the boat at prices based on the market rates.

The dominant role played by the fish collectors in the supply chain has been greatly reduced. However, the collectors still have a role and are collecting from fishers who land their catch late at night or when other buyers are not available.

Current fish supply chain



Figure: Buying fish in the beach

Table – Difference in fish prices

Fish Variety	Baseline situation	Current situation
	Price received by fishers (Average per kilo in LKR)	Price decided by fishers (Average per kilo in LKR)
Sardinella	70 - 80	170 – 200
Frigate tuna	40 - 50	100 – 110
Jack	250 - 260	450 - 500
Rock fish	120 – 130	200 – 250
Anchovy	30 - 35	70 – 80
Cuttlefish	120 – 130	200 – 250

These price increases were attributed to increased access to buyers rather than any seasonal factors.

2. Access for refrigerated vehicles

The paths also allow refrigerated vehicles to access the beach. According to fishers, if they have a sizable catch they can call these vehicles to come directly to the beach so that the fish can be sent to Negombo market.



Figure: Trucks on the beach

3. Support for divers

The newly constructed access paths have been very beneficial for divers in the area, who fish for sea cucumbers etc., to transport their tanks to the beach.



Figure: Transport divers' equipments

Access roads facilitate illegal fishing

Despite the fact that using four wheel tractors to drag seine nets is prohibited by law in Sri Lanka, this practice is commonly undertaken by seine net owners. Fishers report that the seine net fishers park their tractors on the access paths and then drive them onto the beach only when needed. By doing so it is easier to avoid any action by the authorities.

Figure: Fish buyers at the beach





Figure: Illegal use of tractors in the beach

- Increasing vehicle access to beaches facilitates illegal fishing practices, such as the use of tractors to pull seine nets.
- The improvement of access to beach landing sites needs to take place as part of a more comprehensive fisheries management plan.
- It is necessary to implement an environmental impact assessment before further expansion or replication of the activity.
- On-going evaluation of the impacts of the Sinnapaduwa access paths should take place.

Lessons learned and best practices

- Facilitating access to the beach landing sites for buyers has created almost immediate benefits for fishers.
- Construction work was completed before the rainy season in order to minimize erosion.
- Community organizations together with local technical officers were used for construction in order to reduce costs and to boost local ownership.
- Land was freely donated by the Fisheries Societies in order to construct the access paths.

About RFLP

The Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for South and Southeast Asia (RFLP) sets out to strengthen capacity among participating small-scale fishing communities and their supporting institutions in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam. By doing so the RFLP seeks to improve the livelihoods of fisher folk and their families while fostering more sustainable fisheries resources management practices. The four-year (2009 – 2013) RFLP is funded by the Kingdom of Spain and implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) working in close collaboration with the national authorities in participating countries. For more information about the Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for South and Southeast Asia (RFLP) see www.rflp.org or contact the Regional Information Officer Steve.needham@fao.org