

The Livelihood Issues Faced by a River Shrimping Community in Urban Sri Lanka

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Catching river shrimp as a livelihood is not a very popular income source in contemporary urban Sri Lanka even though there are communities who still do this as their livelihood living in riparian areas. There is one such small, low-income community living near Bolgoda Lake who catches river shrimp as their livelihood. The research field is located in the Kesbewa Urban Council area. At present, it is the third generation who lives in this riparian and follows this livelihood. There are 32 households in this community. Though the research field is well-known as a river shrimp livelihood community, after a few visits, the researcher was able to identify that the number of households which are permanently engaged in river shrimping has reduced to four (4) from the earlier 20–25 households that primarily engaged in catching river shrimp apart from other work. Today in almost all the families, at least one member is involved in fishing as the livelihood but not in river shrimping. This was the driving factor for the researcher to conduct research in the area. The main research problem is related to the livelihood issues faced by the river shrimping community in urban Sri Lanka. The main objective was to identify livelihood issues faced by the river shrimping community. The other objectives were to identify the social exclusion faced by the particular community as a low-income settlement in the area and to identify how to enhance the social inclusion of the particular community through their livelihood. There were three research questions related to what the livelihood issues faced by the particular community were, what the social exclusionary practices they face in the city were, and the ways to enhance their social inclusion. I used in-depth interviews and participant observation (during certain events that took place in the river shrimp livelihood community) to collect data and information. I conducted 22 interviews covering different age groups in the community. The major findings are elaborated under the sub themes the issue of informal/formal separation, economic instability and livelihood insecurity, the issue of Beraliya population, water pollution, and garbage, the issue of finding a reasonable market to sell, not having reasonable equipment to develop their livelihood, unwillingness of the third and next generations to continue in the same livelihood, and finally, the issue of social stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion. The main argument in this paper is that the livelihood issues faced by the river shrimping community are the reasons for the decrease of river shrimping or the shift to fishing and the social exclusion experienced by them as a low-income settlement in the area.

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