

F-08 Comparison of socio-economic conditions of fisherfolk during periods of high and low water level

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Victoria, the deepest hydro-power reservoir created under the Accelerated Mahaweli Programme is subject to periodic fluctuations in water level depending on the weather. An acute drawdown of water of about 60 or 70 m invariably follows conditions of drought. Using a pre-tested questionnaire, the socio-economic status of the fisherfolk during extreme fluctuations of water level was investigated.

Regular fishing in the reservoir is restricted mostly to periods of high water level and the fishermen are able to earn Rs.2000-4000 per month during this period. Slab holders at the Digana market sell around 20-70 kg of fish per day while cycle and motor cycle vendors sell between 20-40 kg of fish during this period.

During periods of acute drawdown which can last 3-4 months only 15% of the total number of fishermen and 10% of the traders operate. The majority of the fisherfolk derive an income during the drought by switching over to alternative business activities, such as cattle and goat farming, trading in vegetables, fruits, spices, coffee, tamarind and coconuts.

The majority seek occupation as manual labourers. Others depend on financial support from relatives.

It is essential that the Government should make suitable arrangements through the Fisheries Co-operative Society of the Victoria reservoir to find alternative employment for fisherfolk when the water level is low.

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