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Community based cooperative fisheries management: Lessons learnt from Kalawewa inland fishery in Sri Lanka

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Community-based cooperative fisheries management is one of the property right approaches in fisheries management which seems to be a vital option in many of the artisanal fisheries especially where government lacks resources to implement and manage the fisheries. A similar approach has been adopted for the management of Kalawewa fishery. Therefore, the primary objective of this research was to examine the lessons learnt from community-based cooperative fisheries management in Kalawewa inland fishery. A sample of 33 fishermen was selected from Wijithapura landing site considering ease of access to the respondents. An in-depth interview was held with fishermen in February, 2013 to collect primary data. Data were analyzed using SPSS16.0.

The results of Wilcoxon signed rank test indicated that the respondents had a favorable attitude about the role of Kalawewa fisheries cooperative when it was functioning well. Fish stocking could be done in a successful manner in collaboration with the National Aquaculture Development Authority. The failure of the cooperative to collect money fairly and equally from every sub cooperative to buy fingerlings led to weakening of this institution. The cooperative could prevent illegal fishing gear and punish offenders with the support of the police. However, at present due to lack of monitoring, controlling and surveillance of illegal fishing gear by the government and fisheries cooperative, almost all fishermen of Kalawewa reservoir engage in illegal fishing such as using prohibited mesh sizes and net types. Inability to control illegal fishing in certain fishing communities around Kalawewa reservoir influenced the fishermen to leave the cooperative. The fisheries cooperative is unable to resolve the conflicts among the resource users, leading to its further weakening.

The current status of the Kalawewa fisheries cooperative shows some 'disappearing' symptoms which is an indicator of unequal distribution of benefits within the fishing communities. Therefore, revitalization of the Kalawewa fisheries cooperative is of paramount importance to uplift the community based cooperative fisheries management in order to address the prevailing key issues of illegal fishing and conflicts among the resource users.

Keywords: Community-based cooperative fisheries management, Kalawewa reservoir, illegal fishing